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A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

At the Picasso Museum *by Hilton Kramer,* 1
Milan Kundera *by Roger Kimball,* 5
Starring Cindy Sherman *by Jed Perl,* 14
Dorothy Wordsworth *by Bruce Bawer,* 26
New poems *by Daniel Mark Epstein & Elizabeth Spires,* 35

Music: Casanova at the City Opera *by Samuel Lipman,* 39; **Theater:** Why Edwin Drood had to die *by Mimi Kramer,* 43; **Art:** Donatello as curator's choice *by Creighton Gilbert,* 52; Two sculptors *by Eric Gibson,* 57
Books: *Roland John Wiley* Tchaikovsky's ballets *reviewed by Eva Resnikova,* 61; *Anthony Burgess* Flame into being: the life and work of D. H. Lawrence *reviewed by Robert Langbaum,* 67; *Timothy Materer, editor* Pound/Lewis: the letters of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis *reviewed by Victor M. Cassidy,* 71; *Andrew Motion* Dangerous play: poems 1974-1984 *reviewed by Robert Richman,* 76; **Letters,** 82

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Roger Kimball wrote on the new Hood Museum at Dartmouth College for the November issue of *The New Criterion.*

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Elizabeth Spires's second book of poems, *Swan's Island,* was recently published by Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

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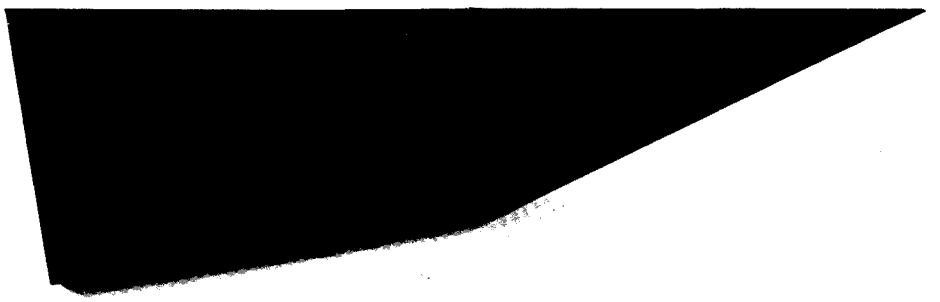

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At the Picasso Museum

by Hilton Kramer

It was to be expected that the opening of the Musée Picasso in Paris would be a capital event, and so it has turned out to be. No secret had been made of the number and quality of the works of art which had come to the museum from the artist's estate. A blizzard of publicity had inevitably attended the deals that were made between Picasso's heirs and the French government in the aftermath of his death in 1973 at the age of ninety-one. Some of the more outstanding works which came to the museum as a result of those tax-settlement deals had already been exhibited in the historic Picasso exhibitions shown in Minneapolis and New York in 1980, and were much remarked on at that time. There was no question, then, that the museum would be an important repository of the master's work. Exactly what the full scope of the collection would be, however, remained something of a mystery. Picasso had long been known to be a hoarder of his own work, and in virtually every period of his long career he had, of course, been one of the most copious producers in the entire history of art. It was also known that as he grew older and commanded great wealth, Picasso had gone to some trouble to buy back, either through purchase or exchange, examples of his earlier work which remained in private hands and which he deemed especially important. The well-known masterworks permanently reposing in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Hermitage in Leningrad, and sundry other museums the world over were clearly beyond his reach, and it is doubtful, in any case, that he would have felt the need to alter their status even if it had been within his power to do so. They had, after all, been instrumental in spreading his fame and influence far and wide, and in certain cases—that of the Museum of Modern Art, for example—Picasso himself had at times played a role in shaping these important collections of his work. Yet in Paris, oddly enough, there was no comparable Picasso collection on permanent public view—a reflection of the fact that in the most crucial stages of the development of his work, the principal collectors of his art had tended to be foreigners. Thus, without the establishment of the Musée Picasso by agencies of the French government, there would have been no such public collection of his work in the city whose artistic life Picasso had dominated in the heyday of the School of Paris.

Now that the museum has opened and we have had our first look at its contents, there can be little question about its importance. The Musée Picasso contains the single most comprehensive collection of the artist's work to be found anywhere, and there is no possibility that it will ever be superseded in this respect. Even with *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* in New York and *Guernica* in Madrid and other pivotal masterworks scattered throughout the great art museums of the world, the Musée Picasso is now the

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place where Picasso will have to be seen and studied if his work is to be fully comprehended. No other collection in the world gives us such a sustained and intimate account of his immense oeuvre. None affords us such unremitting access to the innermost recesses of his artistic thought. Only in certain loan exhibitions assembled from a wide range of public and private collections have we ever been offered anything like this detailed examination of the ways in which the artist worked when, upon taking possession of a new idea or a new experience—for Picasso, there was rarely any clear demarcation between the two—he developed it with an almost demonic speed and confidence until it had ceased to yield him a fresh inspiration.

In this regard, the only event in recent memory that invites comparison with the new museum is the mammoth Picasso retrospective organized by William Rubin at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1980. Yet as wonderful as that exhibition was in so many ways—it, too, will never be superseded in scale or quality—it was not only a temporary exhibition that can never be repeated but it was very much the work of a great scholar and connoisseur who inevitably imposed on the subject his own view of it. That it was, in my opinion, a very sound view and resulted in the greatest Picasso exhibition to be seen in our time does not alter the fact that it represented a curatorial gloss on the subject. It is not in the nature of things for such an exhibition, no matter how encompassing or informed, to represent with any exactitude the artist's view of his own oeuvre. That, we may be sure, is more likely to be shaped by a pattern of memories and associations, by strong feelings and unappeased obsessions and special affections, by prejudices both personal and artistic, than by the kind of "objective" criteria deemed appropriate to scholarly connoisseurship. At the Musée Picasso we are, so to speak, back in Picasso's court where it is the artist himself who largely determines what we see. This is so unusual in our experience of a great artist's work that the mind naturally goes in search of something comparable. But what is there? The Munchs in Oslo suggest themselves, but the period of real achievement in Munch's case is too circumscribed to constitute a persuasive comparison. Perhaps the Turner bequest in London might offer something similar if we ever get to see it in its entirety. For the most part, however, there is nothing comparable. In this matter, as in so many others, Picasso made certain that he would have no rivals. In the end he avenged himself on the collectors of his work, whom he needed and resented and manipulated all through his long career, by emerging triumphant as the single greatest collector of his own art.

What, then, does the museum collection actually consist of? The excellent inaugural catalogue[1]—the first volume in what will constitute a series—lists two hundred and three paintings, sixteen collages, twenty-nine reliefs, one hundred and sixty-two sculptures, and eighty-seven ceramics. It also lists over one hundred items from Picasso's private collection of other artists' works (Courbet, Renoir, Degas, Derain, Matisse, Miró, Balthus, et al., in addition to a great many primitive objects). Except for certain items in this collection of other artists' works, which will presumably be shown in the future, virtually everything in the catalogue—more than six hundred objects—is permanently on view. Then, too, there are the works on paper, which are said to number more than three thousand. These will no doubt be published in full in future volumes of the catalogue. Only a small portion of this material is now on view, however. Dominique Bozo, the founding director of the museum who has lately assumed the direc-

1 *Musée Picasso: Catalogue sommaire des collections.* Volume I. Introduction by Dominique Bozo. Catalogue by Marie-Laure Besnard-Bernadac, Michèle Richet, and Hélène Seckel. Biographical chronology by Laurence Marceillac. Published by the Ministère de la Culture, Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux. 316 pages. Paperback, 200 French francs.

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torship of the Pompidou Center as well, proudly claims the drawing collection to be without parallel, and one can well believe it. For in addition to including a number of dazzling examples which are exhibited in appropriate contexts throughout this initial installation, the museum has also mounted as a special inaugural event a temporary exhibition focusing entirely on Cubist drawings. I doubt if there has ever before been an exhibition of Picasso's Cubist drawings to match this one. It not only shows the artist himself at the height of his powers, but constitutes in itself one of the supreme moments in the history of art in this century.

There is also, of course, a fair amount of documentation—photographs, manuscripts, letters, notebooks, exhibition catalogues and announcements, newspaper clippings, review articles, and other memorabilia—on view in the museum. This material is very intelligently selected, and the tact and discretion with which it is displayed cannot be too highly praised. Mr. Bozo obviously faced a difficult problem in relation to this documentary material. Picasso was the most highly publicized artist in modern times—perhaps the most highly publicized of all time. He was also the most autobiographical of artists. Certain aspects of his celebrity, moreover—especially those related to the women in his life—are not easily separated, if indeed they can be separated at all, from his purely artistic pursuits. The temptation to exploit this situation, to play to the crowd that knows (or thinks it knows) something about the artist's life but little or nothing about the true magnitude of his art, must surely have been great, and there is anything but a shortage of material available to abet this interest in gossip and scandal. I am happy to report that this temptation has been firmly resisted. So has the ghastly practice of imposing an excess of reading matter on our perusal of art objects. The documentary material is isolated in display cases at appropriate intervals in an installation arranged by periods determined by the subject's artistic development. The documents are readily accessible to those who want to study them, but they are at every point clearly distinguished from the art itself. And it is upon the art, first and last, that Mr. Bozo has focused our attention.

A similar sense of tact and taste has governed the handling of the museum building. It was a happy inspiration for the French government to acquire the Hôtel Salé, an elegant seventeenth-century house in the Third Arrondissement, for this museum. (The address is 5, rue de Thorigny, an easy walk from the Pompidou Center.) One can well imagine Picasso setting up his studio in a house of this sort, and the large airy rooms prove to be entirely sympathetic to the art which is now housed in them. Fortunately, no attempt has been made to provide a "period" setting—either of Picasso's time or that of the Hôtel Salé. And the one aesthetic addition to the premises—the chairs, benches, and chandeliers which Mr. Bozo commissioned from the late Diego Giacometti, who completed the work shortly before his death last year—has likewise proved to be an appropriate and delightful adornment. All in all, I think museum directors the world over—and not least, alas, in the United States—have much to learn from the way Mr. Bozo has carried this challenging project to a brilliant conclusion.

It helps, of course, to start out with a great collection, and this the Musée Picasso has in abundance. It is particularly rich in works from the early Cubist period—not only because of the drawings already mentioned, but also in the great number and variety of collages and relief-constructions, many of which (it is my impression, anyway) have not been exhibited before. In certain of these small painted constructions we rediscover the origins of all of modernist sculpture, and they also have the interest of showing the artist in one of his most inward and thoughtful, most apollonian periods. Never again, I think, does Picasso's art attain anything like the sense of harmony and disinterestedness which characterizes the work of the classical Cubist years. In the so-called Neo-Classic period, which is also strongly

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represented in the collection, he turns outward, to be sure, and produces much that is poignant and grave and beautiful, yet throughout this phase of his development one finds oneself waiting, a little nervously, for that detonation of rage and violence which, when at last they make themselves felt in all their shattering force, are scarcely ever again absent from his work right to the end of his life.

Our first glimpse of this impulse to untrammeled fury comes, indeed, in the midst of the calm usually associated with the Neo-Classic period, in the painting called *Les Amoureux* (1919). It is given a particularly intense and powerful statement in *Le Baiser* (1925), and remains an obsession in the pictures of his last years. It is this impulse to fury that dominates the paintings of the Thirties when for the first time a political element is mingled with and played off against the erotic, which nonetheless remains the artist's dominant obsession. Abetted by his interest in Surrealism, which aspired to precisely this identification of the political with the erotic, and much aggravated by political developments, especially in Spain, Picasso from the Thirties onward becomes, in a sense, another kind of artist—unappeasably *enragé* not only in relation to what was happening in Europe and the world but in relation to his own fate as a man. In tracing this downward course—downward, certainly, if we think of the Cubist years as marking the peak of his achievement—to an ever more dour and agonized old age, the collections of the Musée Picasso afford us an experience like no other I know. One does not, from the paintings of the Forties onward, always admire the works that one sees in this collection. (I remain, I am afraid, unashamedly unconverted to the paintings of the "late" Picasso, which have lately achieved an almost universal chic.) And there is no avoiding the grave issues of character and personality which are forced upon our attention by the artist's personal and political actions—the broken lives he left in his wake at every turn, for one thing, and his support of the Communist Party during one of the worst periods of Stalin's tyranny, for another. Yet, no matter what questions are raised or how repelled one may be by one or another aspect of the artist and the man, one leaves this museum in no doubt whatever that one has been witness to one of the central achievements of the age. One leaves, indeed, rather shaken, and not least by the thought that we are unlikely to see our civilization produce an artist of this magnitude very soon again.

Finally, I think we are lucky in having this museum available to us at this particular moment. In the years immediately ahead we are going to be treated to a great deal in the way of biographical revelation about Picasso, and my guess is that we are going to be in need of a strong stomach to get through it all. Before that deluge comes, therefore, it is well to be reminded of what the true glory of Picasso's art consists of, and to an appreciation of that glory the Musée Picasso makes an incomparable contribution.

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The ambiguities of Milan Kundera

by Roger Kimball

The Czech novelist Milan Kundera was in his late thirties when he published his first novel, *The Joke,* in Prague in 1967. The book traces the fortunes and amours of a young student, Ludvik, after his exasperatingly patriotic girlfriend decides to show the authorities a postcard he had written her as a joke: "Optimism is the opium of the people! A healthy atmosphere stinks of stupidity! Long live Trotsky! Ludvik." As a result of this whimsy, Ludvik finds himself expelled from the Communist Party and the university, and is eventually conscripted to work in the mines for several years.

The appearance of Kundera's acerbically political novel coincided with—indeed, it was only possible in—the short-lived liberalization of Czech society that has come to be known as the Prague Spring. *The Joke* went through three large printings in quick succession and instantly won Kundera a wide and enthusiastic readership in his homeland. It also won him the somewhat less enthusiastic attention of the Communist Party. At the end of August, 1968, Russian troops abruptly occupied Czechoslovakia, putting an end to the Prague Spring and the reformist government of Alexander Dubček. In a bitterly ironic variation on the fate of his character Ludvik, Kundera was relieved of his teaching position at the Prague Film School and deprived of the right to work. *The Joke* was banned and removed from public libraries—"erased," as Kundera put it, "from the history of Czech literature." Finally, in 1975, Kundera emigrated to France, where he has since resided.

Kundera first came to the notice of American readers in the mid-Seventies with a collection of short stories, *Laughable Loves* (1974), and *The Farewell Party* (1976), a novel. Together they earned him a small but devoted following among aficionados of contemporary fiction. But it was not until the publication of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* in 1980 that Kundera really established himself among the American literary intelligentsia—though, in fact, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* did not so much *establish* Kundera's reputation here as *enshrine* it; it elevated him to that pantheon of writers whose productions exist more as untouchable objects of admiration than as works susceptible to critical commentary. And Kundera's latest novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984), only confirmed his apotheosis.[1] Most reviewers dispensed with criticism altogether and instead vied with one another to concoct suitably handsome words of praise. Not merely "brilliant,"

1 Kundera's literary work is translated from the Czech by Michael Henry Heim. *Laughable Loves, The Farewell Party,* and *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting,* first published by Knopf, are now available in the Viking-Penguin series "Writers from the Other Europe," which is under the general editorship of Philip Roth. *The Joke* (English translation 1982) and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* are published by Harper & Row.

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"daring," or "provocative," *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* was widely held to constitute Kundera's patent of literary immortality, establishing him, in the words of one reviewer, "as the world's greatest living writer."

Now, Kundera is indisputably a writer of enormous talent. Especially at a time when fiction in this country seems caught somewhere between the dreary banalities of Ann Beattie, the quasi-pornographic imaginings of John Hawkes, and the narcissistic obscurities of Donald Barthelme, he appears as a novelist of almost preternatural force and inventiveness. But precisely because Kundera has assumed such eminence, his work deserves more than indiscriminate celebration. Though he has developed a voice that is unmistakably his own, his best work exercises an appeal that can be said to epitomize the *ethos* of contemporary "dissident" fiction: fiercely intellectual, it is charged with a cool, at times almost brutal eroticism and ironic humor, and it is everywhere at pains to declare its fictionality, to call attention to its novelistic status. Thus in coming to appreciate the distinctive appeal of Kundera's fiction—its substance, its vitality, its challenging idiosyncrasies—we may also come to understand one of the most important (if also perhaps one of the most problematic) aspects of contemporary fiction generally.

At the same time, we may discover something about the sensibility of the *audience* for this species of contemporary fiction. For despite its obvious literary sophistication, Kundera's work is also deeply political, drawing heavily on his experience of totalitarianism in an effort to explore the difficult spiritual landscape that his characters populate. Kundera has by no means always affirmed his status as a dissident writer; on the contrary, especially in recent years, he has striven to qualify, even deny, that status at every turn. But it is, I believe, in the political dimension of his work—or, more accurately, in the ambiguous attitude Kundera adopts *toward* the political dimension of his work—that we will find an important source of his tremendous appeal both in this country and in Western Europe.

"The identity of a people or civilization," Kundera wrote in an essay that appeared in the English quarterly *Granta,* "is always reflected and concentrated in what has been created by the mind—in what is known as 'culture.'" Many, perhaps most, of us tend to equate the culture of Czechoslovakia and its Austro-Hungarian neighbors with the culture of Eastern Europe. That we should so blithely cede the cultural as well as the political heritage of these countries no doubt tells us much about the nature and success of the Soviet Union's custodianship there. According to Kundera, though, the defining cultural impulse of that area has its source not in the patrimony of the East but in the spiritual legacy of the West. "What does Europe mean to a Hungarian, a Czech, a Pole?" he asks. "Their nations have always belonged to the part of Europe rooted in Roman Christianity. They have participated in every period of its history. For them, the word 'Europe' does not represent a phenomenon of geography but a spiritual notion synonymous with the word 'West.'"

In proclaiming this cultural affiliation with Western Europe, Kundera underscores his allegiance to the fundamental Enlightenment values of skeptical rationality and individualism—traditional liberal values that he summarized in another essay as "respect for the individual, for his original thought, and for his inviolable private life." It is no secret that these values have come increasingly under siege in modern society, most brutally and systematically in totalitarian regimes, but also, Kundera would insist, in democratic regimes, where the imperatives of mass culture compromise private life and discount genuine individuality. It is of course this latter insistence—that freedom and man's privacy are threatened as much in Western democracies as under Communism—that has won Kundera so many friends on the Left, for whom the defiant, anti-Communist stance of the dissident writer is perfectly acceptable provided that his defiance

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extends to all expressions of authority, notably to those that provide a haven for his dissidence.[2] But taken in conjunction with his attempt to downplay the frankly political message of his work, Kundera's criticisms of the West highlight ambiguities at the heart of his position—ambiguities that force us to question the good faith and ideological motives of this troubling writer.

Time and again, Kundera has praised the "wisdom of the novel" as a counter to the leveling influence of modern society. In the midst of an environment hostile to private life and the integrity of the individual, the novel appears as a sanctuary where the "precious essence of European individualism is held safe as in a treasure chest." It is thus not surprising that the major thematic concern of Kundera's fiction, from *The Joke* through *The Unbearable Lightness of Being,* is with the fate of the individual in modern society, especially in modern Communist society.

Of course "the fate of the individual in modern society" is hardly uncharted territory for novelists. But this venerable theme breathes with new life in Kundera's work, in large part because of the adroit way in which he manages to interweave fact and fiction. His characters occupy a stage that is defined half by Kundera's imagination, half by the historical reality of recent Czech history. He tends to work with extremely short chapters and a shifting, episodic narrative that together create a montage of images, story lines, and characterizations. To this end, he has developed a terse, sinewy style, sharply ironical yet urgently engaged. The narrative is constantly interrupted as Kundera steps back to impart a bit of philosophy, autobiography, or psychological conjecture. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being,* for example, begins with a reflection on Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal return—a reflection that itself returns to become one of the book's leitmotifs—and *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* is studded with straightforward factual accounts of historical incidents.

In many ways, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* is Kundera's most accomplished work to date. With it he perfected his digressive narrative technique, in which themes are stated, developed, transformed, and interwoven more or less on the model of a musical variation—an analogy that Kundera has been fond of invoking when describing his writing. Yet in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting,* Kundera's "variations"—his excursions into philosophy, say, or intellectual history—never strike one as being mere intellectual decorations, inessential to its life as a novel, as they do, at times, in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being.* The book follows the melancholy, often overlapping careers and erotic entanglements of several sets of characters as they struggle to salvage some sense of joy and vitality, some sense of themselves as individuals, against the bleak backdrop of present-day Czechoslovakia. Kundera pauses throughout to descant on subjects as diverse as mass psychology, the nature of the novel, and the fate of various heroes of the Czech resistance. In one of two key chapters entitled "The Angels," for example, Kundera suddenly interrupts his story, recalling that

> [s]oon after the Russians occupied my country in 1968, I (like thousands and thousands of other Czechs) lost the privilege of working. No one was allowed to hire me. At about that time some young friends started paying me regular visits. They were so young that the Russians did not have them on their lists yet and they could remain in editorial offices, schools, and film studios. These fine young friends, whom I will never betray, suggested I use their names as a cover for writing radio and television scripts, plays, articles, columns, film treatments—anything to earn a living. I accepted a few of their offers, but most I turned down. I couldn't have gotten to them all, for one thing, and then too it was dangerous. Not for me, for them. The secret police wanted to starve us out, cut off all means of

2 For a critical assessment of Kundera's ideological position, I refer the reader to Norman Podhoretz's "An Open Letter to Milan Kundera," in *Commentary,* October, 1984, pp. 34-39.

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> support, force us to capitulate and make public confessions. They kept their eyes out for all the pitiful little escape routes we used to avoid encirclement, and they meted out severe punishments to the friends who gave me their names.

Characteristically, this sober report is sandwiched between two very different and seemingly unrelated narratives, the first installment of a tale about two naïve American schoolgirls at summer school abroad preparing a presentation on Ionesco's *Rhinoceros,* and Kundera's essayistic elaboration of a metaphysics of laughter. His commitment to irony naturally leads him to extol laughter, but he is careful to distinguish two kinds of laughter: "demonic" laughter, which is fundamentally dissenting, lonely, even nihilistic, and "angelic" laughter, which sentimentally rationalizes a world whose contradictions and sufferings it deliberately blinds itself to. It follows that, in Kundera's bestiary, "Devils," though essentially a negative, admonitory force, manifest an heroic skepticism that immunizes them to the hypocrisy of sentimentality; "Angels," on the other hand, acquiesce in illusion and refuse to acknowledge the lie at the heart of the utopia they crave.

What Kundera calls demonic laughter plays an enormously important role in his work. Though his fiction can be as freighted with existential pathos as anything by Sartre or Camus or Kafka, it is nevertheless possessed of a levity and insouciance that make it as entertaining as it is thoughtful. His depiction of the American schoolgirls' report on *Rhinoceros,* for example, crystallizes the book's central themes in a moment of surreal, "demonic" hilarity.

Given the self-consciously playful character of Kundera's novels, it is hardly surprising that he cites Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste* as crucial inspirations. And while the tone and "feel" of Kundera's fiction is distinctly more modulated—more "linear," one might say—than those rambunctious early novels, their influence can be felt throughout his work, both in its self-consciously digressive narratives and in the ironic humor that Kundera insinuates into even his most stringent philosophical meditations.

Closer to hand, Kundera's humor reminds one even more of the great Austrian novelist Robert Musil, whose sprawling, unfinished masterpiece, *The Man Without Qualities,* is perhaps the most profound and certainly the funniest portrait of decaying *fin-de-siècle* Austrian culture we possess. Kundera has not created any character as memorable as Musil's Ulrich—the protagonist of *The Man Without Qualities*—nor has he rivaled Musil's scope or incisive social satire; but his fiction bristles with a kindred ironic, highly intellectualized wit.

Kundera also specializes in that brand of emotionally distanced, often farcical, eroticism that has become a hallmark of so much modernist and "postmodernist" fiction. Here again, we can see the influence of the ribald tradition of Sterne and Diderot. Diderot's novel especially is celebrated by Kundera for its "explosion of impertinent freedom without self-censorship, of eroticism without sentimental alibis."[3]

In fact, though, Kundera's depictions of sex are edged with a loneliness and even desperation quite absent from the more playful work of his acknowledged precursors. His fiction abounds in explorations of what we might call intimacy in distress. The erotic lives of his characters become a theater in which a wounded individuality, half capitulating to forces inimical to it, struggles to preserve itself. As Kundera put it in the interview with Philip Roth that appears as the afterword to *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting,* "with me everything ends in great

3 Kundera was so taken with the famous Diderot novel that he undertook what he describes as a "variation" of it in the form of a play, *Jacques and His Master.* The play opened last year at the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts, under the direction of Susan Sontag. For a review of that production, see Mimi Kramer's "Kundera and His Master," in the March, 1985, issue of *The New Criterion.*

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erotic scenes. I have the feeling that a scene of physical love generates an extremely sharp light which suddenly reveals the essence of characters and sums up their life situation."

There are dramatic and usually unhappy sexual liaisons throughout Kundera's work, generally centering on his characters' inability to combine love with sexual passion. "Physical love only rarely merges with spiritual love," he concludes sadly in *The Joke.* Particularly revealing, I think, are Tomas's reflections on "erotic friendship" in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being.* They exhibit a thoroughgoing aestheticism that not only typifies Kundera's treatment of erotic matters but also says a good deal about the underlying sensibility of his work *tout court.*

Like Kierkegaard's aesthete in *Either/Or,* who attempts to defeat boredom by cultivating a systematically arbitrary approach to life, Tomas attempts to establish "a compromise between fear and desire" by steadfastly avoiding any genuine emotional involvement in his relationships with women. He has become a connoisseur of what Kierkegaard called "the rotation method." "To insure that erotic friendship never grew into the aggression of love," Kundera explains, Tomas

> would meet each of his long-term mistresses only at intervals. He considered this method flawless and propagated it among his friends: "The important thing is to abide by the rule of threes. Either you see a woman three times in quick succession and then never again, or you maintain relations over the years but make sure that the rendezvous are at least three weeks apart."
>
> The rule of threes enabled Tomas to keep intact his liaisons with some women while continuing to engage in short-term affairs with many others. He was not always understood.

The problem for Tomas, as again for Kierkegaard's aesthete, is the intractable *reality* of his lovers; once they are gone they assume a pleasing poetic existence that can be enjoyed at will without the endless accommodations that any real relationship involves. "His love for Tereza was beautiful, but it was also tiring: he constantly had to hide things from her, sham, dissemble, make amends, buck her up, calm her down . . . . Now [that she had left him] what was tiring had disappeared and only the beauty remained."

There is of course a large element of satire in Kundera's depiction of Tomas, as there is in most of his depictions of intimate feelings. But satire has authority only to the extent that one can discern a credible alternative to the reality being satirized; otherwise it becomes indistinguishable from what it satirizes. And the truth is that Kundera's own aestheticism, his own rebellion against the reality of what he describes, robs his work of any such alternative.

Kundera suggests that erotic intimacy promises a real, if already threatened, refuge for individuality in the modern world; hence he often insists that his books are essentially "love stories." Yet it must be said that in Kundera's novels sex is generally a rather chilly, dehumanizing event, an exercise that offers precious little refuge. Not to put too fine a point on it, there is something distinctly creepy about his portrayals of intimate relationships. One thinks, for example, of Ludvik's aborted seductions in *The Joke,* of the amusing but strikingly passionless orgies in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting,* or of the dismal erotic adventures featured in *Laughable Loves*; in every case what we see is sex in the service of power, betrayal, diversion, or despair, only very rarely in the service of affection or genuine intimacy. Not surprisingly, this aspect of Kundera's work has added greatly to its appeal, especially in the academy, where there is an abiding appetite for this sort of lugubrious depiction of sex.

The cumulative—and carefully calculated—effect of Kundera's style is fiction endowed with a sense of great immediacy and directness, with a nimbus, so to speak, of reality. Though we are everywhere reminded that we are reading fiction, in the end such

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reminders tend to increase rather than diminish our confidence in the authority and truthfulness of the narrator. "It would be senseless for the author to try to convince the reader that his characters once actually lived," Kundera writes of his main characters in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being.* "They were not born of a mother's womb; they were born of a stimulating phrase or two or from a basic situation. Tomas was born of the saying *'Einmal ist keinmal'* ['Once is never']. Tereza was born of the rumbling of a stomach." It is all merely fiction, yes, but we somehow feel that in admitting this the author is taking us into a deeper confidence, preparing us for some important truth.

By self-consciously warping the border between fact and fiction, Kundera's work manifests a characteristically modernist preoccupation with the relation between art and truth, between art and reality. The essence of this preoccupation was summed up by Thomas Mann's Serenus Zeitblom, the narrator of *Doctor Faustus,* in his reflections on the situation of modern music:

> In a work there is much seeming and sham, one could go further and say that as "a work" it is seeming in and for itself. Its ambition is to make one believe that it is not made, but born, like Pallas Athene in full fig and embossed armour from Jupiter's head . . . . [N]ow the question is whether at the present stage of our consciousness, our knowledge, our sense of truth, this little game is still permissible, still intellectually possible, still to be taken seriously; whether the work as such, the construction, self-sufficing, harmonically complete in itself, still stands in any legitimate relation to the complete insecurity, problematic conditions, and lack of harmony of our social situation; whether all seeming, even the most beautiful, even precisely the beautiful, has not today become a lie.

Kundera, too, would seem to ask whether the beautiful illusions that art produces are to be taken seriously; certainly, his fiction adopts a posture of questioning their apparent self-sufficiency. He continually intrudes images of all that is problematic, insecure, unharmonious about daily life into the untroubled kingdom within which art reigns supreme. But unlike Mann, Kundera does not use the conventions of art to question our faith in art's illusions; rather, he skillfully imports *gestures* of reality in order to give his fiction an aura of truth and critical weightiness.

Probably the central critical element in Kundera's work is his attack on sentimentality. This takes various forms, and is evident throughout his writing, in his essays as well as his novels. Everywhere there is a deep suspicion of sentimentality, of feeling unscrutinized by doubt. Thus he pokes fun at "the obscure depths," the "noisy and empty sentimentality of the 'Slavic Soul.'" And in his introduction to *Jacques and His Master,* he criticizes Dostoevsky's novels for creating a "*climate* . . . where feelings are promoted to the rank of value and of truth."

For Kundera, the battle against sentimentality is at the same time a battle against forgetting. "The struggle of man against power," we read at the beginning of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting,* "is the struggle of memory against forgetting." In Kundera's terms, the struggle of memory against forgetting is man's struggle against whatever social or psychological forces would deny the continuity and individuality of his personal history. Hence the attack on sentimentality is only the other side of his defense of individualism. For it is just this—the lonely and irreducible *privateness* of experience—that sentimentality promises to dissolve. The essential appeal of the sentimental is precisely that it relieves one of the burden of individuality and the responsibilities of adult experience. As the literary critic Northrop Frye observed, sentimentality "resists, as a child would do, the inexorable advance of all experience in time, which it tries to arrest by nostalgia . . . . Sentimentality is the subjective equivalent of the mob's stock response to mood."

It is a version of sentimentality that Kundera explores in *The Book of Laughter and*

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Forgetting under the name of circle dancing. "Circle dancing" is his metaphor for the intoxicating lure of the group, the mob, what Frye calls the stock response. Kundera pictures his characters joining together to make a circle. They "take two steps in place, one step forward, lift first one leg and then the other . . . . I think I understand them. They feel that the circle they describe on the ground is a magic circle binding them into a ring. Their hearts are overflowing with an intense feeling of innocence . . . . Circle dancing is magic." This magic is the spell cast by the dream of a paradise where distinctions vanish and all men are brothers. In this sense "paradise" tokens not the fulfillment but the denial of the human condition. "The longing for Paradise," as Kundera put it, "is man's longing not to be man."

Underscoring the political dimension of circle dancing, Kundera confesses that in 1948, after the Communists had taken power in Czechoslovakia, he also "danced in a ring," until he was expelled from the Party and "had to leave the circle." It was then, he tells us, that he became aware of the "magic" qualities of the circle, a magic that gives weight to his claim that "totalitarianism is not only hell, but also the dream of paradise." "The whole period of Stalinist terror," he writes in the afterword to *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting,*

> was a period of collective lyrical delirium . . . . People like to say: Revolution is beautiful, it is only the terror arising from it which is evil. But this is not true. The evil is already present in the beautiful, hell is already contained in the dream of paradise and if we wish to understand the essence of hell we must examine the essence of the paradise from which it originated. It is extremely easy to condemn gulags, but to reject the totalitarian poesy which leads to the gulag by way of paradise is as difficult as ever.

What Kundera dramatizes as circle dancing in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* he analyzes as "kitsch" in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and in several occasional essays. While he points out that the term has its origin in Munich art circles in the nineteenth century, for Kundera "kitsch" refers not simply to a species of bad art but to the deliberate sentimentalization of reality. As Kundera notes, his discussion of kitsch is deeply indebted to the writings of the German novelist and essayist Hermann Broch. Following Broch, he views kitsch not so much as an aesthetic as an ethical or metaphysical category. What we generally think of as kitsch art is for Kundera merely one, rather minor, product of kitsch. Like circle dancing, kitsch is an instrument of forgetting. It offers man an escape from the burden of individuality. "Kitsch," he wrote in one essay, "is the translation of the stupidity of received ideas into the language of beauty and feeling." In *The Unbearable Lightness of Being,* he remarks that kitsch has its source in the *"categorical agreement with being,"* meaning that kitsch involves what he would call an "angelic" blindness to everything problematic and unaccommodating about experience. Ultimately, the ambition of kitsch is to set up "a folding screen to curtain off death."

For Kundera, as for Broch before him, kitsch appears as a universal human temptation. "No matter how we scorn it," he writes, "kitsch is an integral part of the human condition." In this sense, kitsch bears witness to man's desire to secure himself against the incursions of a reality that can never be adequately mastered. The problem with Kundera's analysis, however, is that by so expanding the meaning of kitsch, he threatens to empty it of critical content. It may be that kitsch cannot be understood as a *purely* aesthetic category; the aura of moral disapproval that it carries with it suggests that this is the case. But what does it mean, for example, when Kundera asserts that "we can regard the gulag as a septic tank used by totalitarian kitsch to dispose of its refuse"? There is no doubt that totalitarianism can make effective use of kitsch; but to speak of "totalitarian kitsch" is to trivialize totalitarianism by assimilating it to a category that has its home in aesthetics; it is in effect

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to poeticize totalitarianism. To say, with Kundera, that "kitsch is the aesthetic ideal of all politicians and all political parties and movements" is to elide just those differences among political parties and movements that really matter. Similarly, when he has a character in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* compare the sentimental response of an American senator watching children playing on the grass to "the smile Communist statesmen beamed from the height of their reviewing stand to the identically smiling citizens in the parade below," he ignores the fact that what matters here is not so much the kitschy sentiment as the uses to which it is put.

The great appeal—and great danger—of concepts like kitsch is that they invite one to discount the real differences among things in the name of a putatively deeper, more essential unity—a unity, however, that enjoys merely a conceptual existence. They thus allow one to maintain a pose of critical distance without the inconvenience of having to make the hard choices that genuine criticism involves. And while there is no doubt that Kundera brings considerable insight—not to mention cleverness—to his explorations of sentimentality, circle dancing, and kitsch, he also indulges in a lamentable tendency to aestheticize these concepts, to use them to disarm the very distinctions they were meant to illuminate.

Kundera's response to this objection would be simply that, as a novelist, he is not in the business of taking positions. "Now, not only is the novelist nobody's spokesman," as he put it in one essay, "but I would go so far as to say he is not even the spokesman for his own ideas." He goes so far, in fact, as to insist that we view his work as little more than an ironic game, as writing "on the level of hypothesis." This is evident, for example, in his objection to being regarded as a political writer. Admitting that he detests Communist regimes, he hastens to add that "I detest them as a citizen: as a writer I don't say what I say in order to denounce a regime." A political reading of his work, he suggested in one interview, is "a bad reading." Even the label "dissident writer" annoys him because it imports a political terminology that he claims to be "allergic" to. Again, in the 1982 preface that he contributed to *The Joke,* Kundera recalled that "When in 1980, during a televison panel discussion devoted to my works, someone called *The Joke* 'a major indictment of Stalinism,' I was quick to interject, 'Spare me your Stalinism, please. *The Joke* is a love story'"—this in a book whose entire psychology is unintelligible without the assumption of such an indictment.

Of course, there is an important sense in which Kundera is right: fiction does exist "on the level of hypothesis," not on the level of fact; novels are not position papers. But there is something deeply disingenuous about appeals to the hypothetical or gamelike character of fiction when those appeals are meant to mask or deny the very real political content of one's work. And this, unfortunately, is the effect of Kundera's rhetoric. For like so many dissident writers, Kundera, though he embraces Western culture and Western freedom, maintains a fundamentally equivocal attitude toward the West. True, as he would be the first to point out, there is much to bemoan about the aggressive superficiality of Western mass culture and the tasteless intrusions of the media into our private lives. But it is one thing to criticize these cultural failings, quite another to pretend that they are in any relevant sense cognate with the evil of totalitarianism—to pretend, that is, that they are somehow merely different versions of the same spiritual malaise.

In fact, though, in statement after statement this is precisely the posture that Kundera has adopted. In an interview with Philip Roth that appeared in *The Village Voice,* for example, Kundera was asked if he thought private or intimate life were less threatened in the West than under Communism. "The evolution of the modern world is hostile to intimate life everywhere," he replied. Indeed,

> [i]n countries with Communist regimes there's an advantage: we can see clearly what's bad and

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> what's good—if the police tape your private talks, everybody knows that's bad. But in Italy when a photographer lurks around to photograph the face of the mother of a murdered child or the agony of a drowning man, we don't call this a violation of intimacy but freedom of the press.

The implication is clearly that one's privacy and intimate life are just as much in jeopardy in a Western democracy as they are under Communism—perhaps more insidiously in jeopardy in a democracy, for in a Communist society one at least knows where one stands and there is no attempt to glorify shallow curiosity in the name of freedom of the press. No matter that one's writing, one's livelihood, one's very life are at stake in one society where in another one is coddled and showered with acclaim—"essentially" the societies must be made to seem two sides of the same coin. Such a pretense is possible only if one substitutes a thoroughly intellectualized—perhaps one should say "kitschified"—view of the world for the sharper, if less Romantic, discriminations of lived experience. The habits of the media in the West often border on obscenity; but to suggest that the intrusiveness of an Italian news photographer is somehow comparable with the brutality of totalitarianism is absurd. The former may consign one to the front page of a noxious tabloid; the latter abandons one to the cellars of the secret police.

In effect, Kundera wants to have it both ways: he wants both the freedom of fiction and the authority of historical fact; he wants, that is, the cachet of being a dissident writer without the uncomfortably definite political commitments that that status brings with it. Instead, he strives to maintain a completely ironical view of the world, a view that would exempt him from any definite commitment—a view that Friedrich Schlegel, the great theorist of Romantic irony, aptly dubbed "transcendental buffoonery." Thus Kundera describes the "basic event" of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* as "the story of totalitarianism, which deprives people of memory and thus retools them into a nation of children," and yet still insists that "no novel worthy of the name takes the world seriously." But how can a novel recount "the story of totalitarianism" and *not* take the world seriously? No one would suggest that Kundera's writing should be reduced to its political content; but to dismiss that content as part of a "game," as incidental embellishment or atmosphere to what is really a "love story," "*merely* a novel," is to ignore the element that, more than any other, grants it its authority and weight.

Near the end of his essay "Writing," W. H. Auden remarked that "In so far as poetry, or any other of the arts, can be said to have an ulterior purpose, it is, by telling the truth, to disenchant and disintoxicate." In a way, Kundera would seem to agree with Auden's deeply anti-Romantic sentiment. Thus he extols the novel as an ally of individuality—this is its point, its "ulterior purpose": to salvage some remnant of individuality in an age when it is threatened by the equalizing pressures of mass media, sentimentality, and totalitarianism. Like Auden, Kundera champions art as a refuge of the critical, ironic, questioning spirit, as a bulwark against the illusions and intoxicating certainties of kitsch, the forgetfulness of "circle dancing."

Yet in the end the ambiguities of Kundera's position tend to cut the other way. For by insisting on the purely novelistic status of his work—by denying that a large measure of its authority comes precisely from its "seriousness" and accurate reflection of social and psychological realities—Kundera brews an intoxicating potion of his own. Indeed, it is all the more powerful for the whiff, the *suggestion* of truth and reality that it purveys. In this context, we should remind ourselves that criticisms of kitsch, too, can have their kitschy appeal. And it is here, perhaps, that we can witness most clearly the essential ambiguities of Milan Kundera—ambiguities that are not, alas, the inexhaustible ambiguities of human nature but the meaner, more predictable ambiguities of a writer struggling to maintain a predefined image of himself as ideologically correct.

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Starring Cindy Sherman: notes on the new art world

by Jed Perl

At Metro Pictures

There are very few galleries in SoHo where one can have any expectation of seeing art of quality on a regular basis. I can think of fewer than a dozen: Washburn, Ingber, and the cooperatives at 121 Wooster Street come quickly to mind. But in general in SoHo the mise-en-scène surpasses in interest any of the art hanging on the walls. There's an obvious element of theater in the galleries, especially in the deluxe SoHo art palaces, where the immense spaces set the stage for many different gradations of chic and hauteur.

Art-as-spectacle: this is a very old idea whose time has once again come. The courtly culture of the Baroque, with its trompe l'oeil decor and elaborately composed gardens, made art and life into teasing mirror twins. One feels an echo of this theatrical idea—an echo as blurred and off-center as a color xerox copy—in the new ambitions of the art scene in SoHo and the East Village. Style in art and manners in life are viewed within the new art world as analogous. In art, as in life, the breaking of conventions and the adoption of antiquated modes are seen as spectacular, as contributions to the drama of the present. The gallery becomes, like the nightclub, a frame for action. And just as waiters and doormen set the mood for the adventure of an evening out, so the gallery staff—a few quietly refined young men and women—set the tone for the adventure of art. These gallery assistants are art world demigods of youth and fashion. They seem intent yet not overly absorbed; they go about their jobs at the telephone and the typewriter with a special superior air. I wonder how they manage to wear such elegant clothes when their weekly salaries couldn't rent a studio apartment for half a month. (Perhaps it's like one of those O. Henry stories—the single outfit, carefully pressed each night.) But the mysteries of looking good, of keeping up appearances, are an element in their role. They're cult followers, devoted as vestals. They guard the way to that wild genius: the artist.

Sometimes, when one of these fancy galleries has one of its less hot personalities hanging on the walls, you almost feel sorry for the staff. They're just putting a good face on things, and it becomes hard to know what all the fuss is really about. But at the right moment in the right gallery what amounts to an antique sense of decorum seems suddenly apropos. At Cindy Sherman's show at Metro Pictures this October you knew just what the staff was up to. The artist of the moment was in residence —up there on the walls in four-by-six-foot color glossies, acting crazy as can be. The space was full of visitors and the gallery folk were carrying themselves with perfect aplomb. They were fulfilled, and they could have balanced the whole world on the head of a pin.

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The photographs

Cindy Sherman's new group of color self-portrait photographs—there were fourteen in the October Metro Pictures show—have the glossy, unreal look of commercial products. The printing, done in a professional color lab, is technical perfection: Sherman's blues and oranges and greens are screechy-loud, and her highlights have a greasy shine. In this recent group of portrait photographs Sherman (who's just over thirty) is acting the freaked-out female, cut off from normal life. She's got up in ghastly makeup and fake body parts, but the smoothness of the packaging makes it all seem remote and manageable and dull. Sherman has invented a photographic equivalent of the impersonal, licked surfaces of nineteenth-century academic painting. What's going on in the photographs is as out of reach as the doings in the Middle Eastern harems of academic painters like Gérôme. (Sherman includes in one photo or another a turban, a few swags of cloth, and some exotic-looking, overturned beakers and flasks.) Her photographs have the claustrophobic, back-lit feel of the images kids used to look at in Viewmaster stereo machines. The images are overwrought, hyped-up, and the color looks glacé.

Since Sherman began exhibiting in New York at the end of the 1970s, her photographs, which are all self-portraits, have presented a rogues' gallery of the many guises of a modern Everywoman. Sherman and her supporters take some pride in her refusal to quote directly from sources in movies or TV. Her photographs aren't pop rip-offs; they're supposed to be distillations, allegorical readings of the mass-culture gestalt. Sherman began in the late 1970s with a series of small black-and-white photos called "Untitled Film Stills," in which she photographed herself as a career girl, a housewife, a hitchhiker—as all the gals in 1950s movies and TV. The "Untitled Film Stills" series was shot "on location"—in houses, on highways, on city streets—and many of the images included the whole figure and a good deal of naturalistic background. Since finishing the "Untitled Film Stills" in the early Eighties, Sherman has moved into the studio and brought the camera closer in, so that now her face and figure fill up most of the images. She still wears wigs, makeup, and clothes, but she's now trying to convey a psychologically charged feeling, a sense that you're inside the woman's head. Roughly speaking, Sherman has evolved from Doris Day types to Joan Crawford types. In the recent work we're in the world of *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?*

In the new photos—which began as an assignment from *Vanity Fair* magazine to create a fairy tale—Sherman is working over the fairy-tale tradition. She impersonates witches and assorted crazies crawling around in dirt or peeking out from behind ears of wheat. In some of the photos she's a victim, cringing at a danger lurking just beyond our field of vision; in others she's the one who's doing the scaring. What one can see of the settings is either outdoorsy, with hints of earth and vegetation and sky, or else boudoir-like, with pieces of sleazy fabric. Though the settings of Sherman's photos have looked less than naturalistic for the past few years, this show marks the first time she's really gone out of this world. Critics have seen here an interest, new to Sherman, in the primitive—maybe even a response to MOMA's "Primitivism" show. To me this sounds rather highfalutin, and Sherman's discussion of these photos in an interview in the October issue of *New York Talk* (a SoHo fashion and entertainment rag) puts them squarely within her usual range of concerns. I don't think she cares if mankind's oldest fears and obsessions are hidden, like sediment, at the bottom of modern culture. What fascinates her is the ridiculous take-offs on primitive life that she finds in Grade-B movies and in the contraptions sold in novelty shops. Sherman tells the interviewer, Alan Jones (who edited a book of interviews called *The Art Dealers*), that

> [t]here's a great place on Broadway called Gordon's, a giant novelty shop. At first, I didn't use any of their really strange stuff. One

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> transitional piece was vaguely based on a Hansel and Gretel sort of situation—a lost waif-type little girl lying in dirt and rocks. Pretty soon I got into more weird costumes. I love going through all the novelty catalogues. Unfortunately the handless arm stump was sold out when I tried to order it from Gordon's.

In the new series, Sherman wears in one image or another false breasts, buttocks, teeth, wounds, a false beard, and two false noses—a pig's snout and a witch's beak with warty chin attached. In the *New York Talk* piece Sherman says, "I was getting bored with just looking like a different *person.* Now it's much more fun to look like a *monster*! There's something I really like about being completely transformed physically." When you're at Metro Pictures you can't get away from the fact that you're looking at another photo of Cindy Sherman. In working out the costumes and personas, she may have experienced a personal catharsis. I believe her when she says that sometimes "I dance around and look at myself and can't *believe* it!" But what the viewer is conscious of is a SoHo artist putting on a lot of unusual trappings. We may feel a certain curiosity about Cindy Sherman's greasepaint world (how many of us have seen a pair of fake buttocks before?); and yet looking at her photographed performances is nothing like watching a good actor or actress take on some elaborate disguise. Actors have the time element; they can take you over the initial shock of the costume, draw you into the performance, and convince you they've been transformed. They can show the living being within. Sherman's photos are one-shot deals; they're vague and provisional, like the rough costume-sketches stage designers do.

Viewing Sherman's photographs makes me feel like a bored school teacher giving out grades. Sherman presents a neatly finished product—she's no slouch. But her creepy-crawly routines are photographed without a stitch of pictorial inventiveness. This artist is a compositional illiterate. Western art offers so many marvelous ways to pull us in and out of a composition—and so many models for the psychology of gesture—and Sherman misses them all. Maybe she wants us to feel that she's the first artist to use the human figure dramatically; maybe the awkward placements and croppings are meant to look unaffected. But Sherman is far too self-conscious about what she's doing to achieve anything like the intuitive simplicity of the untutored artist. She reminds me of the art student who's taken all the chic courses and then decided to play it primitive.

The photo artists

Cindy Sherman's one-woman psychodramas are extremely contrived; she glories in artificiality. But by presenting her fantasies in the form of photographs she avoids the fussed-over feeling that so many people nowadays attribute to painting. Sherman has invented Allegory Lite. Photographic art is instantaneous, and no matter how fanciful the thought processes that go into it, the final product has a quality of ease and speed. Apparently some artists now see the brevity of photography as a criticism of the older methods of picture making: photography makes painting seem laborious, heavy-handed. Sherman is one of a number of artists who in the past decade have used photographic methods while letting everyone know they're not photographers. They want to wed the ease of photography to the high-art cachet of painting.

For these artists photography is the all-purpose metaphor of modern life. It's at once fast, easy, commercial, chic, thought-provoking, sensational, banal. Photography can suggest the gaudy, glamorous fun of the contemporary city; but it can also make just about anything look ordinary and dull. Photography, which turns everything into pictures, can make us feel that nothing is real; it's the perfect medium for the artist who wants to tell us about the dehumanizing effects of modern mass culture. Some of the new photo art, such as Sherrie Levine's photographic reproductions of art-book repro-

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ductions of German Expressionist paintings (yes: you have read this statement correctly), seem to play, in the Dada vein, at being wittily obscure. There is as well a posturing, messagey side to this new photographic art —as in the work of Barbara Kruger, who juxtaposes images and words. Example: A close-up of the face of a Howdy-doody doll with, superimposed on it, the words: "When I hear the word culture I take out my checkbook." Many of the photo artists favor the cool, remote feel of old-fashioned black-and-white or the blurriness of crummy color shots. Sherman, however, makes no bones about her affection for the glamour of photography. Cindy Sherman is photo art at its lushest; her art is wickedly deluxe.

The new photo art has people standing up and taking notice; it seems to give gallery-goers something they've been craving. Sherman taps straight into the nerve ends of contemporary culture. For the past five years, she's been taking on the pop culture stereotypes one by one, and she's turned herself into a humorless, high-art Lily Tomlin. A counterculture comedienne like Tomlin offers the promise of catharsis: she shows how people bend to the real or imagined demands of the world, and audiences leave her performances feeling easier with themselves and their lives. I think viewers hope for a similar sense of release when they go to look at Sherman's work. Her "Untitled Film Stills" revealed the artist as a rootless independent who could walk in and out of any role society required of her. In her more recent work, Sherman comes on as the terrified or terrifying female, and people probably feel she's creating a wacky technicolor allegory out of all the disturbing feelings they keep bottled up inside. Sherman makes female psychodrama into art-world spectacle.

Sherman may be doing for the women's issues what two other photo artists—Gilbert and George, the British art team—are doing for homosexual issues. Gilbert and George's recent work, which consists of huge photo collages, is mostly about a world of seductively tough or soft working-class boys. If Sherman is playing dress-up-time with all the female clichés, Gilbert and George are playing cut-and-paste with the gay ones. Gilbert and George go so far in one collage *(Life without End)* as to represent themselves as boy worshippers. They kneel in prayer like the donors in some fifteenth-century altarpiece, only in place of the saint there's a working-class boy idol in regulation T-shirt and jeans. The lushness of Sherman's and Gilbert and George's recent work—the extravagant tableaux and brilliant colors—isn't artistically satisfying, but the work has a heat about it, and this is generated by the charged implications of the subjects. These artists are in touch with the outer reaches of contemporary society, the places where conventions and morals are being challenged and unraveled and changed. (Gilbert and George call their photographic pieces "Moral Works.") For viewers who have always been unsure about what they want from art, these photo works may be the perfect answer: you can't miss the connection to life.

Cindy Sherman, Gilbert and George, and some of the other photo artists are taking up the big issues many better artists stay away from. But picking up a hot topic isn't the same thing as making art. (Maybe the good artists have good reason for shying away from these issues, many of which can't—presto!—be turned into art.) The critic Peter Schjeldahl—whose 1982 *Art in America* piece, "Shermanettes," is the most convincing thing that's been written about Sherman—can make you feel Sherman is breaking through all the conventions and flying free. But when I stand in front of the photos at Metro Pictures, I don't feel I'm in the presence of an engaging artistic imagination. There's a tendency in talking about blatantly autobiographical artists like Sherman (and Gilbert and George) to become obsessed with their psychological profiles: are they good people? are they too narcissistic? have they suffered? What's lacking in the work, though, isn't psychological but artistic—the ability to ferret out of an image or a subject some key bit of form, some rhythmic idea.

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What Baudelaire said

In almost all recent discussions of the relations between the artist and society one essay written about two generations ago looms as the classic text to be praised, embroidered, or overthrown. This is Clement Greenberg's 1939 piece, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." Though Greenberg saw the artist as functioning more and more in a domain apart, he was hardly unconcerned with the texture of civilization as a whole. "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" is an essay written in the shadow of what looked to many like the end of Western urban civilization, and it's an essay edged in socialist dreams. At the end, Greenberg observes that "Capitalism in decline finds that whatever of quality it is still capable of producing becomes almost invariably a threat to its own existence. Advances in culture, no less than advances in science and industry, corrode the very society under whose aegis they are made possible. Here, as in every other question today, it becomes necessary to quote Marx word for word." Today, forty-five years later, neither the collapse of capitalism nor the rise of socialism appear imminent, and it seems as if Baudelaire, not Marx, is the nineteenth-century wise man we who are interested in art should be quoting "word for word." Baudelaire's *Salon of 1859*, in particular the section on "The Modern Public and Photography," strikes me as almost uncanny when considered in relation to Cindy Sherman and the new art world.

Baudelaire, who was writing only two decades after the coming of photography, had to see photography's significance somewhat differently than we do a hundred and twenty-five years later. And yet there doesn't appear to be a single element of the peculiar contemporary intermix between photography and art and reality that Baudelaire couldn't have predicted on the basis of what he saw around him in the 1850s. Baudelaire sees photography, with its easy relation to reality, as quelling the sense of yearning and struggle we feel when a painter reaches for the truth. What Baudelaire gets at is the curiously sedative aspect of so much of photography—and especially of artistic photography: its power to distance things, to trap them in amber. For the mass-market audience the revelations of photography become a substitute for the experiences cultured people used to look for in works of art. Baudelaire believes the public is lapping photography up for its cheap, prepackaged thrills. He tells the story of a gathering where an attempt was made to "discreetly conceal" some pornographic stereo photographs from a "beautiful woman, a woman of high society, not of mine." The lady's friends, Baudelaire explains, were "taking upon themselves some feeling of delicacy in her presence; but 'No,' she replied. 'Give them to me! Nothing is too strong for me.'" That's the sort of line you sense playing in the minds of all the elegantly dressed visitors to the picture palaces down in SoHo. Nothing is too strong for them! They're glad Cindy Sherman has gone hog-wild, because now they can prove they're up to watching a pleasant-looking young woman doing gross-out routines with a pig snout or fake buttocks. (A week after Sherman's show closed, the same crowd was at the Castelli Gallery on West Broadway watching Bruce Nauman's new neon jobs; male silhouettes that flashed on and off, every other flash bringing their limp penises erect and often into the waiting rears and mouths of other mostly male figures. The combination of expensiveness and porn was so flagrant it made me laugh out loud.)

Baudelaire's main argument in "The Modern Public and Photography" is that ordinary people prefer the truth of photography to the truth of imaginative art. And though it's become fashionable in recent decades to question the veracity of all photographs, the public still appreciates the relatively simple connection between a photographic image and the world outside. Baudelaire is quite sympathetic to what we would today call "straight" photography—the sort of portraiture and documentary work which his friend Nadar was famous for. What drives him to distraction and inspires his

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best venomous style is the artists who substitute for artistic imagination the frisson of photographic verisimilitude. Photo artists, he says, are trying "to strike, to surprise, to stupify [the public] by means of unworthy tricks, because they know that it is incapable of ecstasy in front of the natural devices of true art." I feel something like this cynical pandering in Cindy Sherman's work.

It's fashionable to say Cindy Sherman is a bad photographer—or that she's not a photographer at all. What these demurrals really tell us is that she's not to be regarded as nature's "humble servant"—which is how Baudelaire described the photographer's role. (The great photographers—Atget, Walker Evans—could be called the geniuses among the humble servants.) Sherman doesn't have a stitch of humility—it's not a SoHo virtue—and she's mucking together exactly those values Baudelaire said were irreconcilable: photographic truth and artistic imagination. Sherman's slick photographic effects are a come-on: they're the glamorous evidence of her imaginative prowess, and they're meant to make us believe in her as an artist. But in the wake of this photographic seduction (to quote Baudelaire) "strange abominations [take] form."

In "The Modern Public and Photography," Baudelaire reserved his deepest rage for the nineteenth-century art photographers who dressed people up in the costumes and poses of historic or literary folk. I find his description of these photographs rather Shermanesque. "By bringing together a group of male and female clowns, got up like butchers and laundry-maids in a carnival, and by begging these *heroes* to be so kind as to hold their chance grimaces for the time necessary for the performance, the operator flattered himself that he was reproducing tragic or elegant scenes from ancient history. Some democratic writer ought to have seen here a cheap method of disseminating a loathing for history and for painting among the people." This last part is most interesting. Baudelaire says the illusions of photographic truth can be used to convince us of untruths—to trash on the truth. This is what most of nineteenth-century art photography was about; and Sherman is really doing the same thing. The banality of the vision—with its rejection of the only truth an artist can ever depend on: the truth of the imagination—makes a capitulation to the most ordinary taste of the bourgeoisie. Baudelaire is hardly the only person who has described the failure of salon art, but he may be the first to connect the emptiness of official art to the mechanistic photographic forms of popular culture. When artists with old-fashioned ambitions adopt new-fangled techniques, the result—in 1985 as in 1859—can be an art that's comfortably shocking. It teaches us how to be shocked and not give a damn.

Pop go the Sixties

Cindy Sherman was born in 1954, and the work she's doing today obviously has a great deal to do with what was going on in the United States when she (and all of us baby boomers) were teenagers in the 1960s. In a way she's a latter day Pop Artist, and Pop was probably the first art to be not just comfortably but even cozily shocking. Cindy Sherman is so enormously successful, it's a little difficult to think of her as a confused artist. But her mental landscape—at least what you see of it in her work—seems like a case of the cool-cat ironies of Lichtenstein and Warhol gone haywire. It's as if Lichtenstein and Warhol and Sixties pop culture is the whole world to her: she seems a bit like the screwed-up adolescent that Paul Goodman describes in his 1963 novel, *Making Do.*

> He regarded the detritus of our culture, the world of TV or Hollywood or even the advertising, as if that were the normal lively world. He did not have enough common sense or confidence in himself to look directly at the street. If a scene was on the TV and had that official warrant and interpretation, he had the courage to think that it was real; otherwise he doubted it.
>
> But then when, inevitably, he became nauseated and disillusioned with such an unsatis-

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> factory reality, he pathetically began to assume that there was a secret metaphysical truth in the disillusioned French and Italian movies, the stereotypes of Harlem and hipsters, the ideology of hasheesh. He desperately wanted these too to be on TV, in order to make sure!

Though there's nothing down-at-the-heels about Cindy Sherman's reputation, her sensibility has a desperate, almost deranged lack of focus.

If one wanted to make up a fantasy of a high-toned theoretical history of Pop, one might say that Warhol and Lichtenstein are Pop's pure, high, classical moment, and that with Sherman Pop is in a sort of crisis-wracked, neurotic, mannerist decline. Maybe bad art does recapitulate in ghastly parody the history of good art: certainly the particular savor of Sherman's photographs has to do with her having lived through Pop's classic moment and become too knowing about all the internal contradictions to be able to keep the forms and sentiments clear. Maybe Sherman suffers from overexposure to the entire hundred-year history of modernism's love affair with the pop world.

In the 1860s, Manet made painting out of the popular Parisian fashions for things Spanish and Japanese. And there have been, in the years since, more than a few attempts at painting and sculpting with one eye on the museum and the other on the underlife or fashionable life of contemporary culture. These attempts have had some happy results: in the work of Robert and Sonia Delaunay, in Schwitters and the other collagists, in Picasso's Ballets-Russes period. But it's never been clear whether the high energy of high art was just sponging up everything in its path, or if pop culture was, in fact, energizing the museum-art tradition.

People who enjoy both pop and high culture have always sensed that there is a sort of general analogy to be drawn between the methods of the two: all art achieves its effects by grabbing hold of a complex of traditions, and then going into them, reshaping them, and transforming them. It's probably this general sense of an analogy that turns so many painters and sculptors into connoisseurs and collectors of pop and folk art of all kinds. But it has always seemed to me that it was people who weren't terribly engaged in either high or popular art—who weren't creators or ardent consumers of either posters or paintings, pop tunes or lieder—who were interested in making the comparisons. If you're really involved in the conventions of an art form and how artists use them, you are just not going to be overly concerned with how one set of conventions ultimately sets up against another. It gets to be an artificial issue. The painter or sculptor who brings pop culture into his work has succeeded when we no longer think to make the better-or-worse comparisons. This is the difficulty for the artist who goes into pop: he's got to create an analogy to the vigor of the street that doesn't get hung up on dreary comparisons.

What Sherman is tying into isn't just Pop Art—it's an attitude toward mass culture in general which really first flowered when she (and this writer, as well) were young. No doubt people have enjoyed peeking beneath the conventions and formulas of popular culture for as long as commercial civilization has existed. Long before the Sixties people had looked into popular forms of art and seen there a hundred odd, bizarre, and occasionally endearing subtexts—it didn't take the Sixties to discover the surrealism in Busby Berkeley or the wildly anarchic sexual personalities of Mae West and Bogie. The Surrealists themselves had revealed pop's hidden texts to a degree. But their disclosures of the kinks in capitalist culture were couched in the best obscurantist language of modernism and were of interest only to a small avant-garde audience.

In the 1960s all the subtexts went public. There were new kinds of stores that sold new kinds of products. There were the poster-sized blow-ups of photographs of Bogie and Mae West, the red-white-and-blue striped and starred and union-jacked clothes and plastic doodads. Hitherto ob-

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scure historic styles, like Beardsley's and Tiffany's, were suddenly ubiquitous. A private, ironic way of looking at the world was transformed into a permanent public revelation. This felt exhilarating at first: who ever dreamed that so many people could be so knowingly ironic about bad taste and quirky good taste and old-fashioned nationalist sentiments? But then, fairly quickly, the context of taste and irony and discrimination that made all these odd things so interesting began to evaporate. The 1960s stumbled into a form of irony that had no perspective from which to be ironic. In Paul Goodman's 1971 book about poetry called *Speaking and Language,* he commented, in passing, on this phenomenon. "In a confused society," he said, obviously referring to his own, "avant-garde does not flourish very well. What is done in order to be idiotic can easily be co-opted as the idiotic standard." The Surrealists may have done certain things in order to be idiotic; but when you walk into Cindy Sherman's show, you know you're just being confronted by the idiotic standard.

Pop culture crops up most convincingly in Sixties art where we may least expect it. The vein of anarchic innocence that for some of us will always say "early Beatles" isn't felt in the heavy, museum-style of Lichtenstein's and Warhol's Pop Art. I find the spectacle of a prepackaged postwar America reflected in some of the more conservative branches of Sixties art, and it's refreshing to encounter artists who don't make a fuss about their pop culture borrowings. There's a bit of the Pop attitude in the opening lines of Randall Jarrell's poem "Next Day," published in *The Lost World* in 1964. We are with a woman in a supermarket.

> Moving from Cheer to Joy, from Joy
> to All,
> I take a box
> And add it to my wild rice, my Cornish
> game hens.
> The slacked or shorted, basketed, identical
> Food-gathering flocks
> Are selves I overlook.

The realist Fairfield Porter, who did much of his best work in the 1960s, also catches something of the surprising ways pop culture impinges on our lives. He will carefully include the present-tense look of a cereal box or a slightly-out-of-date car in the informally brushed "old-fashioned" vision of a still life or landscape. What's invigorating in Jarrell and Porter is the way high-art style seems to buckle and even get a trifle campy in order to include these pieces of the pop world. It's just this sense of high style clashing interestingly and amusingly with the pop scene that's missing in the more obviously modernist works of Warhol and Lichtenstein.

For all its cheekiness, Pop Art is an essentially world-weary and cynical style. In Pop Art the mass-culture images feel frozen and deracinated: they've lost their power to move us in odd, unexpected ways. The trick of basing paintings on photographic images began with the silk-screens of Rauschenberg and Warhol. The Pop Artists didn't enter into the uproar of pop culture, they snipped off bits of it. The method of Warhol and Lichtenstein and Rauschenberg is to take things out of context—this is what gives their work its dissociated, modern look. They've lost the plentitude, the richness of mass culture, and the new photo artists haven't regained it, either. For Cindy Sherman and the other photo artists, the modern look of the work is a function of the disappearance of the brushstroke, that irreducible token of the artist's hand. Sherman, like the Pop Artists before her, has meant to replace the old pleasures of touch and stroke—of the artist searching for a perfect balance as he concocts a fictional world—with the giddy pleasures of pop. There's something depressing about the trade-off.

Nostalgia

As the baby-boom generation heads, in the 1980s, toward grown-up status and even middle age, the 1950s and early 1960s are being transformed into a collection of sen-

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timental vignettes. Nostalgia is one of Cindy Sherman's subjects; Fifties nostalgia is almost the lingua franca of the contemporary art scene. Lots of the new clothes are Fifties-ish in style; and a lot of the routines in the downtown clubs—the drag take-offs on female stereotypes and the Fifties movies, often run with the sound turned off—are paradistic gestures that reflect an extravagant love-hate relation with the days when we were young. The furnishings that those of us whose parents had "good taste" grew up with in the 1950s—the furniture of Charles Eames and Paul McCobb—is now exhibited and bought and sold and collected by people who are in their thirties. The more sophisticated of the rock videos are full of the bright color and sharp outlines of 1950s design, and the new painting is full of the poses and looks—the cigarette smoking and hair-sprayed coiffures—of the time.

This is all rather strange for those of us who were kids back then. I've now had the experience of seeing the dining-room table that I grew up eating at (a modest piece by Paul McCobb) sitting in the window of an antique shop on the Upper Westside. I find that the acquisitive side of my personality is a bit charmed and a bit put off by the way one can now collect the pieces of one's past as a materialized version of the possessiveness of memory. In the 1950s, Charles Eames concocted a deck of playing cards which, instead of the conventional markings, had on both sides collages of color photographs showing a mish-mash of charming and enchanting things.These handsome cards were slotted on each side so they could be put together to make large paper buildings. The set was called "house of cards." As a kid in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in the 1950s I bought a box of these at an artsy store called The Artisans, and they miraculously hung on in my parent's basement through many moves. Now I've reclaimed them. To look at that deck of cards is to engage in a sort of innocent narcissistic fantasy about one's own past—the past is packaged, commodified. And though there's nothing wrong with this as an impulse of the collector or the connoisseur, when narcissism becomes the driving force behind an artist's style, as it does seem to for many now, there is something wrong.

The critic Sanford Schwartz, who's in his thirties, recently touched on this generational ambivalence in a piece in *The New Yorker*. Schwartz was writing about a show of work by the Bay Area artist David Park, who died in 1960. He said he was surprised at "how much Park's best work recalls the fifties." Schwartz said he was "equivocal about this. Part of me thinks that there is something weak and commercial about this period look, that I'm drawn to the pictures for nostalgic reasons. But part of me is fascinated by it." What's missing in most of the new art treatments of Fifties nostalgia is just this element of ambivalence. The artists don't seem able to get at how equivocal we all feel about this recent past of ours.

The Fifties nostalgia that crops up in so much of the new art lacks a sense of detail. Cindy Sherman invokes suburban life and modern design in so broad a fashion that we can't get a handle on her attitude. You don't know what she really has in mind. The better design work of the 1950s had an optimistic spirit about it that's rarely conveyed in the pictures that evoke Fifties style. It was after the war that America first embraced the Bauhaus and biomorphic sensibilities of Europe. The sparkle of Paul Rand's graphic designs—those icons of Fifties style—comes from Rand's way of grabbing hold of the clarity of modern European design and giving it an American spin. (In 1957, Rand and his wife Ann published a children's book called *Sparkle and Spin.*) Rand occasionally used Victorian typefaces and collage snippets from photographs in his work, and these bits provide a taste of what is to come in 1960s design. But with Rand the chaos of mass culture is disciplined by the smart, spanking-new feel of the work—by the faith in modernism.

The Fifties were the last happy stand of modernist design. In Rand's work there's an easy, slightly unthinking optimism that connects with the clean-lined, ecstatic feel-

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ing that is one side of the suburban short stories John Cheever was writing at the time. None of the artists who have been playing with the Fifties recently have gotten at that clear-headed, perfect-Sunday-afternoon feeling. Nor have any of the younger artists been able to get at the other side of the Cheever world: the dark tones, the bleakness inside those two-kids, two-car suburban homes. It's as if the artists who were kids in the Fifties are unable or unwilling to admit that the Fifties were a living, breathing world. Artists in their thirties are turning their own past into a pop-culture cliché.

Toward a new theory of the picturesque

These words are from Rudolf, a one-name-only East Village nightclub entrepreneur: "As a mecca of creativity and craziness [New York] is in decline—this city is out. Rio is definitely happening. And Hong Kong—the lease expires in 1997—believe me those people are running wild." I take this as metaphoric: not so much a rejection of New York as an affirmation of the apocalyptic era so many artists and writers seem to feel in New York just now. The occupants of the new art scene are young and of the middle class. They went through adolescence in the 1960s and 1970s, with credit cards and computers, backyard pools and shopping centers. They grew up with the obviously false lilt of "I'm OK, you're OK" in their ears, and they are attracted to New York because here—despite gentrification, which is a form of suburbanization—they can still feel the contrasts of rich and poor, the elegantly dressed figure moving along the garbage-strewn streets. All this seems to confirm what they sensed beneath the seamlessness of freeway America when they were kids: some permanent disaster in contemporary civilization. The fascination with Hong Kong—or with Berlin—for art watchers is in the strange flowers of the dark, nether realms of civilization. Apparently where the kitsch of capitalism meets the kitsch of communism there's a savor in the air. The grinding dullness of totalitarian bureaucracy is seen to rhyme with the new boredom of an avant-garde with no more tricks up its sleeves.

The young of the middle class have always gone slumming among the real poor, and the margins of civilization have often struck artists as picturesque. Ruins gave the monied classes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries many opportunities for serene reflection on the passage of cultures and civilizations. We know from many nineteenth-century images this attractive view: in the foreground, a gentleman on a little hill; in the perfectly drawn middle distance, the Doric temples of Paestum or the broken tombs of the Appian Way; off to the side, a tumbledown farm, a mother with dark hair and ragged skirts, several children, an ancient but still usable well (the glory of Roman engineering). Poverty can, horrible to say, look picturesque, though only a deranged aesthete will find beauty in misery. In the East Village (hub of an art scene that is very hot, or maybe even past its prime), among the ruins of boarded-up tenements and graffitied walls around Avenues A and B and C, the old appreciation of ruins takes unexpected turns. Though there is still in pockets of the East Village the vitality of ethnic groups, where the real action is supposed to be—east of Second Avenue—a new theory of the pleasures of ruins has been taking form. These ruins aren't real ruins—they point to no previous glory, only to many episodes in an ever present, unremitting decay.

The class content of the taste for ruins hasn't changed completely since the nineteenth century. The comfortably ensconced still like to contemplate the world of the tumbledown. In the nineteenth century, when the "haves" were sure of the space between them and the others, there was room for the view—there was a gentle perspective from which the nicely dressed men and women watched the charming poor. In the contemporary East Village the clarity of class distinctions is gone, and though the poor are still poor—maybe even worse off—

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the monied have lost or denied to themselves the peculiar moral elation of the composed view. On the streets of the East Village the view doesn't compose, and this is surely the heart of the new picturesque. These are the ruins you can't contemplate—it's all interminable, grinding foreground. For those who live there the neighborhood surely has a bit of the comfortable feeling one's neighborhood always has, no matter how bad it is. But speaking as a visitor (and most artists and gallery-goers are visitors) I find almost embarrassing the birth of art galleries in this world, where the rudiments of civilization (the privacy of one's apartment, the interchange of the street) dissolve for the real inhabitants—for those who see America as a dream on TV—into a rubbly nightmare. The middle class will either change the neighborhood or leave it; the underclass may have to leave, but wherever they go, for them it will be the same.

The scene casts quite a spell. The new connoisseurs and dandies sit in the night contemplating not the cameos and engravings of the old aesthete's study but the throwaways of capitalism. A taste for the graffitied ruins of old buildings is only an extreme case of a general passion for what mainstream culture has left behind or cast aside. The fashions and accessories of Fifties moderne, the lurid plastics of Canal Street, the novelty shop tricks and the gold and velvet Hispanic icons of Fourteenth Street are all desirable, for they embody a vague sense of dislocation and represent an unconscious, accidental critique of centrist values. Some of these objects carry real emotion: Hispanic religious kitsch, for example, is a genuine pop style. If you look at the technicolor madonnas printed on cardboard and listen to the pop gospel tunes (where sentimental AM radio love melodies combine with lyrics about Our Saviour) you feel that for the people who actually live with these things they're inspiring—like the dream of a better life, of an apartment somewhere else, probably in Queens. But when the popular forms find their way into the fancy art galleries the emotion goes awry. To love pop culture too much from too great a distance is to let connoisseurship get unhinged.

The image of Cindy Sherman shopping amidst the Halloween disguises of Gordon's novelty store on Broadway is a significant portrait of the artist as a new-style connoisseur of the picturesque. If you're looking for the kooky products of commercial civilization, you probably can't hope for much more than Gordon's. I believe Cindy Sherman has known the ecstasy of shlock. And her sense of the picturesque *is* finely tuned. What are her photos but ingenious dime-store recountings of the categories which the eighteenth-century English theorists of the picturesque liked to enumerate? Sherman's art encompasses, in parody form, the beautiful, the terrifying, and the sublime. The Cindy Sherman who goes to Gordon's is, like the Gilbert and George who photograph the low life of London, a connoisseur of the contemporary picturesque—an egotist furnishing her mind.

Today artists and critics are joined in an addiction to the new picturesque. Their god-protector is that painter of ruins, the late de Chirico. He is a better and a worse and above all a very different artist than his new admirers would have us believe, but the East Villagers are probably right to see in his moodily-lit late work the soul of a sentimental archeologist. To describe the impacted geological layerings of late twentieth-century culture, the new writers on art bring forth a dazzling array of texts. The articles that get written have cascades of wild, often erudite quotations—they can be beguiling. In these essays the figure of Baudelaire wandering through Paris a hundred and twenty-five years ago and of Walter Benjamin wandering through Baudelaire's Paris eighty years later, revolve like the images of infinite regress in some house of mirrors. Watteau also seems a figure with which to be obsessed now (the painter David Salle speaks of him). The paradoxes and delusions of contemporary commercial culture can be compared to the confused values of the late aristocracy which Watteau took as his subject. The illusions of class and the beauties

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of the confusion of the fêtes champetres are perhaps seen as related to the chaotic ambience of the new nightclubs. (In the fêtes, the musical men wear odd, dandified theatrical garb, as they do at the big club on Fourteenth Street, the Palladium, where the go-go dancers can be boys, dressed in Fifties costumes of pleated pants and button-down shirts.) *Gersaint's Shopsign*—the first masterpiece in which the art market becomes a subject for art, and the first example of an advertisement become a masterpiece—this is seen as the extraordinary precedent for many contemporary foibles.

Trompe l'oeil

In Cindy Sherman's photographs the layerings of make-believe and irony and insincerity are piled high. Who's to say what's a pose and what's not a pose? Even beauty, which was so often in the past a sign of goodness or heroism in art can now be presumed to be no more than a brilliant mask. Art's illusions seem more illusory than ever—a house of cards, thin and on the verge of falling down.

Trompe l'oeil—the fine art of fooling the eye and the mind—is the most popular art game in town. Fake masterpieces, fake artists, fake issues: we have them all, and they all have those charming, seductive surfaces. The new art world is a great movie set. No wonder one of its premier showcases is called Metro Pictures. This mocking Pop Art name evokes the old-time movie houses —the kind Edward Hopper might have painted. A gallery called Metro Pictures promises something other than ordinary works of art; it promises the glamour of the silver screen. The name seems to flirt with the vernacular; it has a jokey edge. And yet when you walk inside Metro Pictures the vast white spaces and the obvious smoothness of the whole operation lend an air of sobriety, almost of sanctity. Sherman's pictures have that same combination of the jokey and the serious. Though the costumes and the disguises can't but be a bit funny, in the photographs Sherman's face never reveals the pleasure in dressing up that she describes in the *New York Talk* interview. She always wears a far-off, grave expression. She looks unshockable, as haughty as the queen of some exotic tribe. Trompe l'oeil is serious business.

One can explore all around Cindy Sherman's art—look at her working methods, sources, attitudes. And yet it's in the nature of her photographs that such a search brings us no closer to her. It's like walking up to a picture of a window painted on a wall: the closer you get, the less you can believe in it. In Cindy Sherman's art the Fifties, the Sixties, the East Village, the Grade-B movies, the nightclubs: all of these form an imaginary set of Viewmaster slides that you can pick up and examine, one by one. The images wheel by, like the pictures on the stereo cards that were grabbed by the fine lady in Baudelaire's anecdote. We see some flesh, a masquerade, a memory, a bit of beauty—but it's all remote. The Cindy Sherman photos at Metro Pictures, in their trim, matte black frames, felt, like the images in the stereo machine, infinitely removed. Cindy Sherman, protected by sheets of plexiglass, was untouchable. She revealed nothing about herself; she remained a shadowy figure.

All photography is trompe l'oeil and all trompe l'oeil is tragicomic. There's the tragicomedy of the grand stage—of Rembrandt and Bernini and the Baroque ceiling painters—and then there's the tragicomedy of today. The new art world has turned trompe l'oeil, with its tradition of divine guessing games, into a TV drama of deceit. One expects an artist who wears masks to want to be unmasked; but maybe not. Cindy Sherman has taken on a hundred different roles, and yet you end up feeling there's really nobody there.

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"My dear, dear Sister": the life of Dorothy Wordsworth

by Bruce Bawer

In these days of literary trend-chasing, when every publishing season yields yet another widely acclaimed "Voice of a New Generation," it seems little short of remarkable that the most influential movement in the history of English literature made its way in a relatively hype-free manner. The first generation of Romantic writers based their operation in the remotest part of England, avoided London literary society, and set their work before the public without unseemly haste or self-promotional fanfare. Most striking of all, perhaps, the movement had as its chief historian and prose artist—and, arguably, as its emotional center—one of the most unassuming and unambitious women ever to correct a set of proofs.

They were not, alas, Dorothy Wordsworth's own proofs. For, though she did enough writing in her now celebrated journals to occupy several standard nineteenth-century volumes, not a single word of those journals saw print in her lifetime. It was a life devoted not to her own writing but to her brother William, whom she served in a multitude of ways—going over his proofs, copying his poems, sewing his shirts, keeping his house, and helping to raise his five children. To be sure, while he wrote poetry about the hills and dales of the Lake District where they spent most of their lives, about the common people of the neighborhood and the sights they observed on their tours of Scotland and the Continent, she treated the same materials lovingly and meticulously in her own journals. But if William's poems were intended for the world, her journals were meant only to be read by herself and William, and a few friends and relatives, during long winter nights at home. Though many of those who read the journals tried to persuade her to publish them, she stubbornly refused to do so; "I would detest," she wrote a friend, "the idea of setting myself up as an Author."

This, then, is the sort of woman she was: self-effacing, self-sacrificing, content to stay in the background. Despite the tours, in fact, and the friendships with people like Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Charles Lamb, Thomas De Quincey, and Robert Southey, Dorothy's life—which is competently chronicled in a new biography by Robert Gittings and Jo Manton[1]—differed but little, for the most part, from that of any other middle-class rural spinster of her time. Born on Christmas Day, 1771, in the Cumberland town of Cockermouth, she was the third of five children of whom William (her elder by twenty months) was the second. When she was six, her mother died, and Dorothy—the only daughter—was placed by her father, John, an attorney, into the care of her

1 *Dorothy Wordsworth,* by Robert Gittings and Jo Manton. Clarendon Press, 318 pages, $17.95. Selections from Dorothy Wordsworth's writings are available in *Letters of Dorothy Wordsworth* and *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth,* both edited by Alan G. Hill and published by Oxford University Press.

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second cousin Elizabeth Threlkeld (later Rawson) in Halifax. The Threlkeld branch of the family belonged to that sect known as the Dissenters—which is to say that they were unusually open-minded, sophisticated, and practical in their Christianity, perceiving religious zeal as evil and interdenominational doctrinal conflicts as pointlessly divisive; theirs was a faith not of fire-and-brimstone jeremiads but of tolerance, reason, and optimism. Dorothy was happy with the Threlkelds and, as her biographers note, their unusually enlightened approach to religion had a decisive effect upon her. Gittings and Manton are probably right in tracing to the home of "Aunt Rawson" (as Dorothy called her) "many of Dorothy's most appealing characteristics: scrupulous honesty, a spirit of service, cheerfulness, above all the generous spirit which saw the best in ordinary men and women . . . ." It was in Halifax, too, that Dorothy learned to run a household and to enjoy reading. These years, then—despite the untimely demise of her father when she was twelve—were, for the most part, very happy ones for her.

But when she was sixteen, things changed abruptly. Without explanation, she was passed along to her maternal grandparents, the Cooksons, at Penrith, twenty miles east of Cockermouth. Suddenly she found herself living with two veritable strangers in cramped, cold, and unhospitable rooms above their draper's shop. Her grandfather was ill and cantankerous (he died before the year was out); her grandmother was, in the words of Gittings and Manton, a "staunch believer in original sin" who was "shocked by the hopeful views of nature and society in which Dorothy had been reared by Elizabeth Threlkeld." These old-fashioned folk had little sympathy for Dorothy's love of reading, which she had to pursue on the sly: "My Grandm[othe]r," Dorothy wrote in a letter to her best Halifax friend, Jane Pollard, "sits in the shop in the afternoons and by working par[ticularly] hard for one hour I think I may read the next, withou[t be]ing discovered . . . ." Despite such rigors, Dorothy did make at least two friends in Penrith, the sisters Mary and Peggy Hutchinson; and she was given a French and arithmetic tutor, for a time, in the person of her beloved uncle, the Reverend William Cookson (who had recently served the sons of George III in a similar capacity).

So well did Dorothy and Uncle William get along that when, after a year and a half at Penrith, he married and took over the parish of Forncett St. Peter in Norfolk, he invited Dorothy to come live with him and his wife—and she accepted gratefully. It was perhaps this gratitude that caused her to take up Uncle William's religious convictions and practices so fervently, even though they were utterly at odds with those of the Dissenters. For Uncle William—a close friend of William Wilberforce of the reactionary Clapham Sect—was an Evangelical, a believer in "sobriety, black coats, the sanctified Sabbath." Gittings and Manton recognize the apparent inconsistency in Dorothy's unhesitating switch to Evangelicalism, but argue that "the inconsistency was itself consistent and lasted all her life. She had a generosity of feeling, which overflowed in ardent enthusiasm for the beliefs and concerns of people she loved. To support them was her chosen work and the writings we treasure were to her a by-product." True; but to support loved ones generously is one thing, to be ready to alter one's deepest beliefs at the snap of their fingers is another. What Gittings and Manton seem reluctant to acknowledge is that Dorothy had an extraordinarily weak sense of identity—or, to put it otherwise, a chameleon-like ability to adapt herself, at the most fundamental level, to suit whomever she happened to be living with at the time. This is, of course, understandable; having been removed twice from homes that she loved, she doubtless was so afraid of being sent away once more, and so desperate for a happy and truly permanent home life, that she would make the most profound accommodation in order to secure her desired end.

Yet when she did leave the Cooksons, it was by choice. Indeed, the single most momen-

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tous decision Dorothy appears to have made in her entire life was to break away from the Cooksons and to make a home with her brother William. Though she had seen her brothers only briefly and infrequently since her mother's death, Dorothy's strong sense of attachment to them—William especially—had, it seems, only increased. In 1793 she wrote Jane Pollard a letter praising her brother Christopher (who would become a master at Trinity College, Cambridge) and glorying in the magnificence of her brother William. He is, she wrote, possessed by "a sort of violence of Affection . . . which demonstrates itself every moment of the Day when the Objects of his affection are present with him, in a thousand almost imperceptible attentions to their wishes, in a sort of restless watchfulness which I know not how to describe, a Tenderness that never sleeps, and at the same Time such a Delicacy of Manners as I have observed in few Men." She told Jane that her great ambition was to keep house for William, and looked forward to a time when she and William would sit together in their cottage and

> talk over past days . . . not sigh[ing] for any pleasures beyond our humble Habitation "The central point of all our joys." Oh Jane! with such romantic dreams as these I amuse my fantasy during many an hour which would otherwise pass heavily along, for kind as are my Uncle and Aunt, much as I love my sweet little Cousins, I cannot help heaving many a Sigh at the Reflection that I have passed one and twenty years of my Life, and that the first six years only of this Time was spent in the Enjoyment of the same Pleasures that were enjoyed by my Brothers, and that I was then too young to be sensible of the Blessing. We have been endeared to each other by early misfortune. We in the same moment lost a father, a mother, a home, we have been equally deprived of our patrimony by the cruel Hand of lordly Tyranny. These afflictions have all contributed to unite us closer by the Bonds of affection notwithstanding we have been compelled to spend our youth far asunder. "We drag at each remove a lengthening Chain" this Idea often strikes me very forcibly. Neither absence or Distance nor Time can ever break the Chain that links me to my Brothers . . . .

Years later, when her brother John, a seaman, died in a shipwreck, she would write that "fraternal affection . . . has been the building up of my being, the light of my path." Had she grown up with her brothers, she might well, by the time of her letter to Jane, have begun longing for a husband and children of her own; but having been separated from her siblings throughout her childhood and youth, she now longed for their company—or the company of one of them, at least. To her, it is obvious, they represented the serenity of earliest childhood, and only now, at age twenty-one, was she in a position to do something to regain that serenity.

It was not until a year later, however, that Dorothy left the Cooksons, against their wishes, and was re-united with William. She had not seen him in three years—years which had, for him, been busy ones. Since 1791, he had been graduated from St. John's College at Cambridge; had made walking tours of Wales, France, and the Alps; had witnessed firsthand the opening acts of the French Revolution (which, as a democrat, he supported vigorously); had carried on a passionate affair with a French girl named Annette Vallon, who had borne him a daughter; had thrown over traditional Christianity to become a "worshipper of Nature" (as he would put it in the Tintern Abbey poem); and had initiated his literary career by publishing *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches.* Any other young man who had made of himself a political and religious radical of this sort, not to mention a begetter of bastards, would doubtless have earned Dorothy's censure; but, in William, these deviations from respectability appear not to have disturbed her. As she had quickly learned to conform to the religious beliefs of her households in Halifax and Norfolk, so now she not only accepted but adopted her brother William's causes, his prejudices, his "natural piety." She turned herself, in

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other words, into a Romantic, able to perceive in nature, as William did,

> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things.

Like William, then, she became "[a] lover of the meadows and the woods,/And mountains," finding in nature "[t]he anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,/The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul/Of all my moral being." At Forncett St. Peter, church had been the center of her life; now, in imitation of William, she stopped attending church regularly, and, in Gittings and Manton's words, poured her "innate religious sense . . . into the natural creation." Though she would live to be eighty-three, Dorothy would never forgo this disciple's role. To the end of her days she would faithfully follow William's lead, readily shifting her literary opinions, religious practices, and social behavior in precise alignment with his; in later years, when he resumed churchgoing and became a Tory, so would she.

It is amazing that Dorothy can have thrown herself into "the visionary passion of early Romanticism" (as her biographers call it) as enthusiastically and successfully as she did; but perhaps not as amazing as one might think. Romanticism may well have come more naturally to her than to most. With its emphasis on the distance between Self and Other, it doubtless struck a powerful chord in the young woman who had been raised apart from her family, and who, even by her early twenties, appears to have decided that her life would be barren of physical attachments. Furthermore, Romanticism's nostalgia for childhood, its idealism, and its predilection for both ecstasy and melancholy appear to have jibed with Dorothy's own native inclinations.

Another year and more passed after their reunion before Dorothy and William (who had no independent means of support) were able to set up house together. This was made possible by two friends of William's. In early 1795 Raisley Calvert, the twenty-one-year-old brother of William's school-friend William Calvert, died and left the aspiring poet a legacy. It was not a very large sum, but it would provide enough income to run a house frugally. The house itself, a place named Racedown on the border of Dorset and Devonshire, was provided by a Cambridge friend, Basil Montagu. It was during their two years at Racedown that Samuel Taylor Coleridge entered their lives. "He is a wonderful man," Dorothy wrote Mary Hutchinson. "His conversation teems with soul, mind, and spirit . . . like William, [he] interests himself so much about every little trifle." Coleridge in turn found Dorothy "exquisite," as he wrote his publisher, Joseph Cottle:

> She is a woman indeed!—in mind, I mean, & heart—for her person is such, that if you expected to see a pretty woman, you would think her ordinary—if you expected to find an ordinary woman, you would think her pretty!—But her manners are simple, ardent, impressive . . . . Her information various—her eye watchful in minutest observation of nature—and her taste a perfect electrometer—it bends, protrudes, and draws in at subtlest beauties and most recondite faults.

Years later, another close literary friend of both Wordsworths', Thomas De Quincey, would describe Dorothy as "the very wildest (in the sense of most natural) person I have ever known." To be sure, "the young lady . . . had no personal charms," walked with a stoop, stammered nervously, had a tanned complexion, and was "ungraceful and even unsexual." But she aroused the interest of these literary men nonetheless. Coleridge would later, supposedly, refer to himself, William, and Dorothy as "three people but one soul." Though their friendship would erode as Coleridge's increasing abuse of

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opium and alcohol made him ill, erratic, and unpleasant to be around, the three were, for a time, as Gittings and Manton note, "in a state of delighted wonder with one another, a type of joyful recognition and dazed bewilderment."

Both Wordsworth and Coleridge, then, were greatly influenced by Dorothy—and, as is true of all genuinely intimate influences, the nature of her effect upon their work cannot be pinpointed, but only vaguely suggested. Wordsworth wrote of her, in *The Prelude,* that

> She, in the midst of all, preserv'd me still
> A Poet, made me seek beneath that name
> My office upon earth, and nowhere else.

What does this mean? One imagines that it means Dorothy alone, in the beginning, had faith in his talent and encouraged him in his ambitions. Gittings and Manton read more into it, suggesting that Dorothy helped William to see nature and common people as they were, and not as mere literary fodder, and that her sensitivity and responsiveness induced greater tenderness in him. This may well be. At any rate, it is certain that she inspired, at least in part, many of his greatest poems, such as "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" and (probably) the Lucy poems, and that such works as "Michael," *Resolution and Independence,* "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802," which are based on people or events observed in Dorothy's company, would not have been the same without her. As for Coleridge, Gittings and Manton note that "[h]is three most famous poems—*The Ancient Mariner,* 'Kubla Khan,' and *Christabel*—are not in a style of verse he wrote either before or after; and all three, roughly speaking, were written or put together within the first year after he had been in close contact with William and Dorothy Wordsworth."

In the summer of 1797, William and Dorothy journeyed to Nether Stowey in Somerset to visit Coleridge. On the fourth of July, when Coleridge had planned to take his guests (including Charles Lamb) on a walking tour of the countryside, his wife Sara accidentally scalded his foot with boiling milk; so the Wordsworths explored the neighborhood on their own. A huge, empty house called Alfoxton, which they came across on their walk, so charmed them that they decided, on impulse, to rent it. "Our principal inducement," wrote Dorothy, "was Coleridge's society." It was a momentous day—not only for the Wordsworths but for Coleridge, who, while his friends were out exploring, sat outside his cottage and composed one of his very finest poems, "This Lime-tree Bower My Prison," with its first line: "Well, they are gone, and here must I remain . . . ." (Curiously, Gittings and Manton fail to mention this interesting coincidence.) It was, of course, at Alfoxton that Wordsworth was to compose his poems for *Lyrical Ballads,* the momentous collaboration with Coleridge; here, too, Dorothy would indite the first (and most terse and tentative) of her famous journals. In 1799 Dorothy and William would move to the Lake Country village of Grasmere, where she would produce her most substantial and interesting works—not only the Grasmere journals but the *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland*; thirteen years later, with William's wife and five children, they would move to a large house at nearby Rydal Mount, where Dorothy would, in 1820, write a journal of her tour (with William and Mary) on the Continent.

These journals are worthy of notice for several reasons, but perhaps what is most arresting about them is their utter unself-consciousness. Even her letters do not have this quality: they tend, in the epistolary manner of the day, to begin with elaborate and graceful apologies for not having written sooner, to be composed of long, sometimes euphuistic, and rather formal sentences, and to contain lavish praise for the addressee that cannot help but strike a modern reader as insincere—or, at least, highly affected. Not so the journals. Written in plain, taut, straightforward prose, they pro-

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vide as unobstructed a view of early nineteenth-century life in general, and of life among the Lake Poets in particular, as one could hope for. The brief glimpses they afford of English Romanticism in its infancy are incomparable. It is delightful to read about William going out to the sheepfold to compose, or about Coleridge coming over and reciting *Christabel*; and what could be more charming than the entry for March 27, 1802, in which Dorothy casually announces the birth of "Ode: Intimations of Immortality"?

> A divine morning. At Breakfast William wrote part of an ode. Mr. Olliff sent the dung and Wm went to work in the garden.

Or this, from March 26, 1802:

> William wrote to Annette, then worked at *The Cuckoo* . . . . After dinner I sate 2 hours in the orchard. William and I walked together after tea, to the top of White Moss. I left Wm. and while he was absent I wrote out poems . . . . While I was getting into bed, he wrote *The Rainbow* ["My Heart Leaps Up"].

Quite often, the journals record incidents or observations upon which William later based poems. Consider the entry for July 31, 1802, in which Dorothy describes her departure from London, with William, for a tour of the Continent:

> After various troubles and disasters, we left London . . . . We mounted the Dover coach at Charing Cross. It was a beautiful morning. The city, St. Paul's, with the river, and a multitude of little boats, made a most beautiful sight as we crossed Westminster Bridge. The houses were not overhung by their cloud of smoke, and they were spread out endlessly, yet the sun shone so brightly, with such a fierce light, that there was even something like the purity of one of nature's own grand spectacles.

The prospect that Dorothy depicts here, of course, is the same one described in William's great (if misdated) sonnet, "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802":

> The city now doth, like a garment wear
> The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
> Ships, towers, domes, theaters, and temples lie
> Open to the fields, and to the sky;
> All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.

Like William, Dorothy was fascinated by rural peasants; but whereas he sometimes tends (in "Michael," for instance) to sentimentalize common folk in the manner of one accustomed to the company of the educated and well-to-do, or (as is the case with the Leech-Gatherer in *Resolution and Independence*) to make them over into symbols, Dorothy, in her journals, depicts them realistically. She is unmistakably interested in them not as types but as individuals, and they appear to have recognized this, and to have responded warmly to her interest; "many simple people," write Gittings and Manton, "fell in love with Dorothy at first sight." Many of the peasants whom she describes in her journals, moreover, were the inspiration for poems by William. A postscript to her entry for October 3, 1800, records her and William's encounter with the poor soul who would inspire the composition of *Resolution and Independence*:

> When William and I returned from accompanying Jones, we met an old man almost double. He had on a coat, thrown over his shoulders, above his waistcoat and coat. Under this he carried a bundle, and had an apron on and a night-cap . . . . His trade was to gather leeches, but now leeches are scarce, and he had not strength for it. He lived by begging, and was making his way to Carlisle, where he should buy a few godly books to sell . . . . He had been hurt in driving a cart, his leg broken, his body driven over, his skull fractured. He felt no pain till he recovered from his first insensibility.

But the theme to which these journals continually return is nature. However interested Dorothy may be in recording her

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brother's and Coleridge's literary activities, or in depicting the poor folk who crossed her path, she never fails to tell us what the hills, sky, and streams looked like on a given day. Here, for instance, is the beginning of her entry for October 10, 1800:

> In the morning when I arose the mists were hanging over the opposite hills, and the tops of the highest hills were covered with snow. There was a most lovely combination at the head of the vale of the yellow autumnal hills wrapped in sunshine, and overhung with partial mists, the green and yellow trees, and the distant snow-topped mountains. It was a most heavenly morning.

This is nicely evocative. But too often, in the course of reading through the journals, one longs for a respite from such descriptions. One finds oneself, at such times, wishing that Dorothy had been a bit less interested in nature and rather more interested in *human* nature, in the eighteenth-century sense of the term; one wishes she had been more attentive to Pope's exhortation that "The proper study of mankind is man." She could also, alas, have used a touch of Popean wit; though she may well have been a delightful conversationalist, her journals and letters are almost entirely lacking in humor.

What's more, she seems frequently to bring Romantic melancholy upon herself deliberately—to seek out, in other words, "that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts/ Bring sad thoughts to the mind." On September 3, 1800, she describes a stranger's funeral which she attended for no other reason, it would appear, than to get depressed:

> Ironed till ½ past three—now very hot. Then went to a funeral at John Danson's. About 10 men and 4 women. Bread cheese and ale. They talk sensibly and chearfully [sic] about common things. The dead person 56 yrs of age buried by the parish. The coffin was neatly lettered and painted black and covered with a decent cloth. They set the corpse down at the door and while we stood within the threshold the men with their hats off sang with decent and solemn countenances a verse of a funeral psalm. The corpse was then borne dn the hill and they sang till they had got past the Townend. I was affected to tears while we stood in the house, the coffin lying before me.

One cannot help coming away from the journals, then, with the feeling that, though Wordsworthian Romanticism may have provided a magnificent approach to the creation of poetry, as an approach to the conduct of everyday life it could be downright neurotic.

Dorothy Wordsworth, naturally, was not about to call Romanticism into question. Her dedication, both to her brother and to the type of poetry he represented, was total. This steadfastness was, on the whole, tremendously admirable, but so absolute was it that it sometimes manifested itself in the form of blind loyalty or servility. Her letters testify unequivocally to the zealousness of her partisanship. When, for instance, Mary Hutchinson's younger sister Sara dared to remark that some of the Leech-Gatherer's speeches in an early draft of *Resolution and Independence* were "tedious," Dorothy wrote her to "ask yourself whether you have hit upon the real tendency and true moral . . . and when you feel any poem of his to be tedious, ask yourself in what spirit it was written." Similarly, when a rift developed in 1810 between her brother and Coleridge—William had reportedly described his old friend to a mutual acquaintance as "an absolute nuisance" and "a rotten drunkard," and Coleridge had heard about it—Dorothy, instead of feeling remorse over her brother's indiscretion and disloyalty, spoke up for him vehemently, and, even when the two poets were somewhat reconciled two years later, persisted in her coolness toward Coleridge. Interestingly, years before this incident, Coleridge had suggested that Dorothy's worshipful subservience did more harm than good; Wordsworth, he wrote, lives "wholly among *Devotees*—[has] every the minutest Thing, almost his very Eating and Drinking, done for him by his Sister, or Wife."

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The word "Wife" seems almost an afterthought here. It reflects the degree to which Mary Hutchinson, after her marriage to William, failed—or refused—to take over Dorothy's role as chief votary. Dorothy's treatment of the marriage in her journals is somewhat peculiar. Remarkably, this woman who was so careful to record every change in the weather and to describe the personal history and garmenture of every beggar who came to her door, does not prepare us at all for the upcoming wedding. All at once there it is: "On Monday, 4th October 1802, my brother William was married to Mary Hutchinson." Dorothy did not attend the ceremony at the nearby church; rather, she stayed home and

> kept myself as quiet as I could, but when I saw the two men running up the walk to tell us it was over, I could stand it no longer, and threw myself on the bed, where I lay in stillness, neither hearing nor saying anything till Sara [Hutchinson] came upstairs to me, and said, "They are coming." This forced me from the bed where I lay, and I moved, I knew not how, straight forward, faster than my strength could carry me, till I met my beloved William, and fell upon his bosom. He and John Hutchinson led me to the house, and there I stayed to welcome my dear Mary.

Such journal entries as this one, with its touch of hysteria, have inspired all sorts of speculation in recent years as to the precise nature of Dorothy's relationship with William. Was she in love with him? Was he in love with her? Were they, indeed, lovers, like Byron and his half sister Augusta? Those who would answer "yes" to all three questions offer in evidence Dorothy's repeated references to William, in her journals, as "my darling" or "my beloved." On March 17, 1802: "After dinner we made a pillow of my shoulder, I read to him and my Beloved slept." Two days later: "A very rainy morning. I went up into the lane to collect a few green mosses to make the chimney gay against my darling's return." Four days after that: "The fire flutters and the watch ticks I hear nothing else save the Breathing of my Beloved and he now and then pushes his book forward and turns over a leaf." And the entry for May 31 ends: "My tooth broke today. They will soon be gone [i.e., all her teeth]. Let that pass I shall be beloved—I want no more." Even in their own time the relationship between William and Dorothy was not above suspicion. Gittings and Manton quote Thomas De Quincey to the effect that gossips in Grasmere—and London as well—spoke of "Wordsworth having been intimate with his own sister." De Quincey himself, though, discounted the rumor entirely, ascribing it to "coarse-minded" types "who have not the slightest idea of pure love for any one or of that fine tie which forms the affection between a brother & a sister . . . ." Gittings and Manton, who do not explore the issue at any length, would seem to agree with De Quincey. Indeed, though it seems probable that Dorothy's feelings for William were, to some degree, at least, romantic, no objective reader can come away from her journals believing that there was anything physical between them. Such is the nature of those journals that if she were hiding any sexual secret there would be some indication of it—in small disturbances of tone, of manner; so transparently honest are her feelings about her "beloved" in those pages that it is impossible to believe that anything is being concealed there.

Aside from the romantic references to William, Dorothy's journals never touch upon the matter of her sexuality. Her letters do so only obliquely, when, as a young woman, she responds with uncharacteristic acidulousness to her friends' routine inquiries about the possibility of a young man in her life. One gathers that her emotional arsenal was simply unequipped for anything beyond the level of familial affection, that she realized this early, and that she accepted it as a fact of life. (In this regard, she reminds one of another meticulous observer of the human tragicomedy, Henry James.) She does not appear, however, to have been anything but happy over the romances of others until her fourth decade, when, grow-

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ing increasingly conventional, like William, in her religious attitudes, she spoke out against parties, condemned De Quincey for getting a girl pregnant and marrying her, and recommended "[r]igorous confinement" as a cure for her niece Dora's addiction to "pleasure." She also became politically conservative, supporting the Tories over the Whig candidates favored by the peasantry, to whom she referred, in a letter, as "the misguided mob."

Toward the end of Dorothy's sixth decade, her health began to deteriorate, until eventually she settled into a state of dementia that was probably caused by Alzheimer's Disease. Her mind, as William wrote in a letter to Samuel Rogers, was "much shattered," though she could, at times, hold brief conversations and recite poems from memory. While she lingered on in this condition—amazingly, for two decades—William became increasingly celebrated, winning the Poet Laureateship in 1843, seven years before his death. Dorothy, left to the care of her sister-in-law, outlived him by five years.

Though Gittings and Manton have, for the most part, rendered this story with admirable sensitivity, there is a flaw at the very center of their biography. In a manifest attempt to keep William Wordsworth from taking over the book, and to demonstrate that Dorothy warrants a biography entirely on her own merits, they have relegated the famous brother to the background. Thus, the reader of *Dorothy Wordsworth* has little or no idea, after a certain point, of where William's literary reputation stands at the moment, of what his current themes and preoccupations are, of how his ideas about poetry are changing. There are only a couple of references to reviews of his poetry—and these are only to bad reviews, which might well lead a casual reader to wonder how such a widely denigrated versifier could have ended up as Poet Laureate. This neglect of William, of course, would not be such a bad thing were it not for the fact that Dorothy herself put him at the very center of her life. For her biographers, then, to deny him this focal role is to warp the reader's image of Dorothy to an intolerable degree; more than that, it is to rob Dorothy's life of most of its meaning.

The book itself is an indifferent creation. Like most of the English literary biographies I have read lately—and why, one must wonder, should this be the case?—it is marred by careless prose as well as careless thinking. Infelicitous diction abounds: "Dorothy's journal is nonexistent for the events at Alfoxton in the last week of May"; "Continual visitors came to see the new house." When Gittings and Manton say that a "prospective move caused one of the rare surviving letters from Dorothy to William," one wishes they had said *occasioned* instead of *caused*; when they observe that "Sara's and Mary's criticisms [of *Resolution and Independence*] had been followed" by William, one wishes that they had spoken either of criticisms being *acted upon,* say, or of *suggestions* being followed. The authors also tend to punctuate in a bizarre fashion: "She was determined that Willy, should be better educated"; "At nearly fifty, she was by the standards of the time, an elderly woman." And they sometimes make curious generalizations. For example, after emphasizing, throughout the book, that Dorothy relied upon her brothers financially, they refer, on page 262, to her supposed lifelong "independence in money matters."

The outstanding fact of Dorothy Wordsworth's life, of course, is that she was not independent in any sense; nor did she ever want to be. Her dependence upon her people—particularly William—for financial support, like their dependence upon her in so many more important ways, was to her a wonderful thing. If she was inextricably bound to them, it was a bondage that she prized, that gave her life purpose and form, lent her a sense of security, made her feel loved. One can certainly regret the narrowness of the life she led, the fact that the world was too little with her; but one can only celebrate the extraordinary degree to which she managed, in spite of this, to make her stay on earth matter.

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Poems *by Daniel Mark Epstein & Elizabeth Spires*

Thinking of Thomas Moore

A book that I knew only by the cover,
climbed to a high shelf on a crumbling ramp
years ago, the relic of an old affair.
I took it down, hoping to find out
how one famous bard ran out of fame
and why he had come to haunt me suddenly.
I cracked the book. There was his Irish pout
engraved on the flyleaf, a spiteful genie
whose gratitude grew bitter in the lamp.

The curl of his lip, the eye's tenacity,
show us Tom Moore was not prepared to die,
at least not in print. A preface tells
his life. Born in Dublin, a grocer's son,
he studied with the tutor of Sheridan,
at fourteen enrolled at Trinity,
wrote the sensational "Odes of Anacreon"
that made him a star before the age of twenty.
Small of stature, "though in wit a man,"

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he never grew up. But he sold more
poems than anyone but Byron who
called them "leadless pistols" in a satire.
Moore sent the modern Juvenal a challenge
then recalled it. They became fast friends.
When Byron died he left Moore as legacy
his *Memoirs* to transmute to pounds
in the crucible of public curiosity.
Tom committed them to a gentler fire.

London was shocked by his arrogance,
lack of gratitude or its excess, met
by heroic friendship or its opposite.
For scandal dines as heartily on silence
as on the juiciest gossip where
the subject is a free beauty or handsome poet.
The top blew off the kettle of conjecture.
His *Memoirs* might have served Byron's defense;
the fire branded him as a demon, sure.

But Byron has all the world to tell his story.
Moore has, at the moment, only me.
What about his poems, are there any
lost treasures under the waterfall
of foxed and fading pages, a fire opal
shaken from the crown of a classic beauty,
or merry trinket kicked from a dancer's ankle,
that rolled away flashing out of the world's sight?
I turn the pages out of a sense of duty.

There are the Irish melodies sung in the twilight
of parlors by deep-bosomed ladies and old men.
There are the chiselled "Odes of Anacreon"
in praise of deep drinking and shallow passion.
And page after page, until my eyes are sore,
love poems, love poems by Thomas Moore.
You'd think that little else was worth his time,
or worse, that there was nothing easier
than falling in love and then making it rhyme.

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Whom did you love, Tom? What maid or whore
escaped your manicured verses? There's no sign
of struggle, not a curl or petticoat out of place,
nor desire that puts conscience on the rack.
Your ladies flirt and sigh. They don't talk back.
Oh world of harps and blushes, plumes and lace,
you remember the name of love but not the face.
What did you feel when the last one slammed the door
and how could you tell her from the one before?

Meanwhile a strong wind has attacked the casement
in Tom's defense, breaking up my irreverent
thoughts with louder thoughts that sound like wind
holding forth in the chimney, shaking the door
and drumming up the thunder for a storm.
Wind like thoughts, then wind in human form.
It is the furious ghost of Thomas Moore
rather dignified by death, or by the lightning.
"Who are you to disturb me in oblivion?"

"It's quiet here but I've gotten used to it
now that my friends are dead and I've stopped waiting
to be rediscovered. There's a worse thing
than being forgotten: false laurel, early fame
borrowed from an ancient poet's name.
I paid for that. And I paid for my height
in love affairs that never made a rhyme,
their pain was so much greater than my art.
Honor this pure silence, and mind your own heart."

—Daniel Mark Epstein

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February origami

A room, empty and cold.
A daytime moon, cheek
scraped off, hanging by a thread,
looking in at what you do.
You sit on the floor, cross-legged,
folding and refolding
a square of paper, a letter,
white writing like swirling snow
on a scroll. As a child,
didn't you sit by the window
coaxing raucous paper cranes—
red, green, and yellow—
to fly into a sky of blue?
Now what could you say or do
to make a piece of paper fly away?
You watch your hands,
two birds, shape paper into
a white, diminishing thing.
Here is my heart, you write,
quill sipping ink from a bowl.
Here is my heart.
Take it if you have to.
Two wings beat in your hand.
The injured moon, sheer
as rice paper, slips away.
It is a white, white day.

—*Elizabeth Spires*

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Music

Casanova at the City Opera

by Samuel Lipman

There is a curious, though little-noticed aspect, to the reports that come out of performances of new American operas. As with political candidates who are always winning (to hear them tell it) until the very instant they absolutely must concede, the mood emanating from first performances and new productions of contemporary American works is always determinedly upbeat. In the case of each new opera, we are told that the audience loved it; that the cast and orchestra applauded the composer with *real* enthusiasm; that the critics thrilled to the sound of their own praise; that this time at least the cause of new native opera *really* has a winner. Unfortunately, time and time again over the last twenty-five years, the love of the audience, the applause of the performers, the thrill of the critics, and the operas themselves are forgotten. And after every disappointment the cycle starts up again with the same threadbare optimism, only to end with the same weary resignation.

Dominick Argento's *Casanova,* performed three times in the first two weeks of November by the New York City Opera in the State Theater at Lincoln Center, seems to be another possible exception to this rule of failed optimism followed by oblivion. Originally entitled *Casanova's Homecoming,* the work was written as a commission from the Minnesota Opera, by whom it was performed last spring in a coproduction with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. Its November performances by the City Opera marked its New York premiere, and its first appearances after the world premiere. Critical reception in New York ranged from enthusiastic to overwhelming, and there now seems little doubt that the City Opera will repeat *Casanova* next season, and that the example of Beverly Sill's company will inspire other productions across the United States in the coming years.

The work that now enjoys such happy prospects is an operatic setting—to a libretto written by composer Argento himself—of Casanova's return home to Venice in 1774 as a relatively old man of forty-nine. Partly true and partly invented, the plot involves three major episodes, one per act. The subject of Act I is Casanova's seduction of an opera singer who Casanova's enemies think is a castrato, but who turns out to be just what the always-wise Casanova thought, a very feminine and passionate woman. In Act II Casanova, an adept at necromancy and the occult, conceives and carries out an elaborate scheme for tricking a rich old woman, who wants to be reborn into the body of a male infant, into giving up her jewels to provide a dowry for one of Casanova's godchildren. In Act III, it seems at first that Casanova's time has come, for he is accused of practicing magic, of defrauding the old woman, and of murdering her by exposing her to a storm on the Grand Canal during the process of robbing her. But then Casanova talks his way out of the charges by showing—falsely—that he had only received

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a small amount of money from the woman, and that the "magic" he had practiced on her had only been making love to her. The opera thus ends happily, with everyone beaming. Casanova is shown to be a rogue so good-hearted as not to be a rogue at all, but instead a philosopher who teaches us how to get the best out of life.

In order to present on the stage a story so rife with possibilities for broad humor and comedy, the production of *Casanova* employed richly costumed crowds, numerous sight gags, acting marked by broad gestures and mugging, and technical effects that included storm-tossed waves and, at the final celebration of the Casanova philosophy, fireworks. The guiding principle of the stage direction seemed everywhere to be a maximum of busy movement, a veritable froth of activity designed to provide a full dollar's worth of entertainment in the theater.

To deal with the bedeviling problem of what to do with the words, which now seem to be so necessary in opera, this production resorted to the currently red-hot practice of surtitles, called subtitles in the evening's program. These snippets of the sung text are displayed in two lines of relatively dim letters projected on a broad band at the top of the proscenium, extending across its entire width. The obvious reason for the insertion of this mechanical device between singers and audience—even when the opera being done is in English, as *Casanova* was—is the difficulty performers have in pronouncing the text clearly as they sing, a difficulty frequently compounded by the large houses in which opera is done in this country and by the impossibility (in any space) of being heard against the large accompanying orchestras. But opera has survived across the decades without the singers' words being very much more clearly heard than they are today. Why then the present rage for understanding, and for the surtitles which, it is hoped, will allow such understanding?

The answer, quite plainly, is that the audience must clearly understand the words because the *music* can no longer be counted on to make the necessary dramatic effect. Remarkably, this is true for today's expanded opera public even in the cases of the great *musical* masterpieces of the repertory. No longer can Mozart's, or Verdi's, or Wagner's, or Puccini's, or Strauss's music be counted on to satisfy an increasingly ill-educated and unsophisticated audience. Untutored and vacant minds wander, and the best way of keeping them attached to the performance seems to be to make them hang on every word.

What is true for accepted—and supposedly familiar—masterpieces is doubly true for new and recent works, written in contemporary and often difficult musical styles. It is no secret that new music—to adapt Paul Klee's phrase about the visual arts—*trägt kein Volk*: new composition is not supported by the audience, as we have all learned to our sorrow. Thus for twentieth-century operas an understanding of the words as they are being sung seems to provide the only possibility of exciting public interest.

In the case of the City Opera production of *Casanova,* the surtitles undoubtedly did their job. Time and again, one had the feeling that the audience was laughing at the words not as they came out of the singers' mouths but rather as they appeared on the screen some forty feet above the performers' heads. Since it seems unlikely that a viewer of opera can look simultaneously at the screen and at the singers onstage—a difficulty immeasurably greater the closer one sits—this performance of *Casanova* presented the anomaly of an audience reacting not to what it heard (and saw) being sung, but rather to what it was reading at more or less the same time.

What was slighted here was not just the text as sung. The chief casualty of these frenzied attempts to involve the audience in the opera was the requirement of taking Argento's music seriously. Perhaps this really was a blessing in disguise, for as music what Argento wrote seemed largely pastiche. The impression resulted from what must have been a conscious attempt on the composer's part to quote from musical and

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operatic styles of Casanova's day, and also from the influence of those twentieth-century composers—Richard Strauss and Igor Stravinsky come immediately to mind—whose own compositions were often based on borrowings. The danger for Argento's music was that it would be heard—at least by sophisticated listeners—not simply in its own terms but in the terms of its models. A further danger was that it would be judged not merely against its eighteenth-century models but against the way Strauss and Stravinsky used the work of others to find their individual styles.

Faced with this competition, it cannot be said that Argento's music comes out very well. In Act I, for example, the writing "in the style of" Niccolò Jommelli (1714-1774), "one of Casanova's favorite composers" (according to an article in the City Opera magazine *Spotlight*), not only seems scrappy and lacking in any long line; it signally fails to achieve the piquancy and affecting charm of Strauss's extraordinary appropriation of Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-1687)—and others—in the music for Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (1912-1918). In the climactic moments of Act III, it is again Strauss who provides the successful material by which Argento must be judged. At the very end of the opera, when one can feel Argento attempting to invoke every talent he possesses to write lyrically affecting music the crucial phrase seems to have been lifted from the tumultuous moment in Strauss's *Elektra* (1909) just after Aegistheus and Klytemnaestra have been killed by Orestes.

Because Argento's music is built up out of so many short and disparate bursts, the listener is reminded of Stravinsky as well as of Strauss. It was Stravinsky, after all, who wrote *The Rake's Progress* (1951), an opera on a similar subject. That the *Rake,* in which so much depends upon the device of the bearded lady, was not so far from Argento's mind is shown by Casanova's words as he watches a *commedia dell'arte* troupe present their own mocking version of his seduction of a purported castrato: "Not bad! That's *almost* the way it was, but you forgot *one* thing—she also had a *long* beard!" Argento's use of eighteenth-century music in Act I, too, cannot but summon up recollections of how Stravinsky used the models of Gluck and Mozart in the *Rake* to an altogether more interesting—and more musically satisfying—purpose. Perhaps not less important, Argento's music suffers by comparison with Stravinsky's heroic achievement in *Pulcinella* (his ballet after Pergolesi, 1920) of reforming our entire modern idea of the way old music, played in its original form, should sound.

Taken on its own merits, without regard to the question of the superiority of its models, Argento's music lacks the long line (composed of both melody and architectonic structure) which is the chief bringer of musical power. The ability to write this long line, whether original or derivative, is a specifically musical gift. Necessary as long line is to pure music, it—and not an excellent libretto or a sure feeling for stagecraft—is the *sine qua non* of operatic composition. Its absence is most conspicuously marked at the great emotional and musical denouements of opera. And so it is in *Casanova*: the moment Argento's *musical* talent should take over, in order to justify the entire work, is in Casanova's concluding statement of his philosophy:

> The important thing is: to live;
> to love;
> And most of all—to love living.
>
> "My system, if it can be called a system,
> Has been to glide away unconcernedly on
> the stream of life—*Sequere Deum*—
> Trusting to the wind wherever it led.
>
> For happy or miserable,
> Life is the only blessing man possesses
> And those who do not love it are unworthy
> of it."
>
> Prize it above all things. And
> Praise it as much for the darkness as the
> light.

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Whatever the merits of these paltry sentiments as a guide for life, they deserve—if *Casanova* is to prevail as a work of art—a powerful musical treatment. But this does not happen: instead the music is thin, plain, and even angular, thus giving the impression that the composer himself can't believe what his hero is saying at the climax of the opera.

Here, then, is the problem of pastiche in music: not just the problem of Argento's use of pastiche, but of everyone's. The Strauss of the complete score for *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* and the Stravinsky of *The Rake's Progress,* though they are recognized as great composers who have written, in these cases, fascinating and beautiful works, have both found it uphill sledding to convince the music-loving public that these works come directly from the heart.[1] The problem with the works of Strauss and Stravinsky is writ large in *Casanova*: it is that of projecting an integrated and consistent view toward the characters and their situation, a view which can only be expressed by the composer through an integrated and consistent musical style. The extraneous elements brought into the score by a conscious dependence on the art music of others—no matter how apt this borrowed music might be for the dramatic situation at any given moment, and no matter how much better it might be as music than any original music written by the composer whose name goes on the title page—must inevitably destroy the unity which is the proudest hallmark of a great work of art.

So in the end the problem of Dominick Argento's *Casanova* is not that it is musically conservative, or even that the vocal writing often seems to be swamped by the instrumental parts which lie beneath. It is rather that the composer Argento never makes clear to us that he believes the words that the librettist Argento has so cunningly written. And so everything in *Casanova* is a joke, and by the end of the opera it hardly matters whether the jokes are meant to be jokes or are just the mock-serious mouthings of silly and foppish people onstage.

When snappily performed, as it was in November at the New York City Opera, *Casanova* is in fact a superior evening of entertainment in the musical theater. Given the paucity of even entertainment in the new works being presented at opera houses these days, this might seem like rather a lot to say. And indeed it is, if the purpose of opera—under the new dispensation of public culture for ever larger audiences—is to be the diversion of audiences. If the purpose is, as it should be, enlightenment about the highest human and aesthetic values and achievements, then *Casanova,* in its very success, marks yet another nail driven in the coffin of a serious American opera. But then the funeral business has always been a profitable one, much in demand.

1 Significantly, the complete music Strauss wrote for *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme,* despite the many felicities it contains (occurring in passages not present in the frequently played suite of "Incidental Music" from the play) and despite the interest which should attach to this collaboration of Strauss, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, and Max Reinhardt, is almost never performed, and remains unrecorded to this day.

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Theater

Why Edwin Drood had to die

by Mimi Kramer

"By the way," I asked suddenly, stopping and turning upon Stamford, "how the deuce did he know that I had come from Afghanistan?"

My companion smiled an enigmatical smile. "That's just his little peculiarity," he said. "A good many people have wanted to know how he finds things out."

"Oh! a mystery is it?" I cried, rubbing my hands. "This is very piquant . . . ."

—Dr. Watson, in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet*

LADY BRACKNELL. Dead! When did Mr. Bunbury die? His death must have been extremely sudden.

ALGERNON (airily). *Oh, I killed Bunbury this afternoon. I mean poor Bunbury died this afternoon.*

LADY BRACKNELL. What did he die of?

ALGERNON. Bunbury? Oh, he was quite exploded.

—from Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*

The audience at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park laughed uproariously this summer when Edwin Drood's wicked uncle Jasper wished the heroine many happy returns of the day:

> JASPER. Rosa, the happiest of birthdays to you. I only pray I may be able to say these words on each of your birthdays.
>
> ROSA. I fear that is not likely, since, as you know, your own nephew Edwin and I will be departing for Egypt once we are married.

Poor Jasper! A respectable choirmaster by day and closet opium-fiend by night, Jasper is passionately in love with Rosa—an awkward contingency, since Rosa is manifestly Edwin's girl and has been ever since the terms of their respective fathers' wills bound the orphaned children to one another in babyhood. Still, what had Jasper done but tell the miserable girl he liked her and would like to spend more time with her. We couldn't help feeling that a simple "Thank you!" would have done, under the circumstances.

But Rosa (or the version of Dickens's heroine that we get in Rupert Holmes's musical adaptation of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*) is no fool. If the audience reads a deeper longing into Jasper's words, so does she; and not for Rosa is the refined passivity of other Dickens heroines menaced by the attentions of disreputable or unpleasant men. (One thinks of Kate Nickleby, suitably helpless before the odious Sir Mulberry Hawk; of Lucie Manette, demurely unaware of Sydney Carton's passion for her; of Louisa Gradgrind, acceptably naïve, right up to the last moment, about what Mr. Harthouse really has in mind.) As a rule, romantic heroines in Dickens are far too nice to be aware of subtext. Not Rosa: she knows all about Mr. Jasper and his subtext and she has every intention of letting him know she knows. Poor, poor Jasper! No wonder he looked intimidated. And no wonder we laughed as Jasper muttered darkly, "It was only a wish, Rosa!"

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The Mystery of Edwin Drood, which opened at the Imperial Theatre in December, is Joe Papp's latest crowd-pleaser. If the above exchange sounds markedly un-Dickensian, that is probably because it is pure Rupert Holmes. In fact, it was our certainty that the dialogue does not appear anywhere in Dickens that seemed funny to us in Central Park this summer. We laughed at the incongruity of Dickensian characters refusing to behave in a Dickensian manner: at Rosa's competence in a situation whose conventions require that she remain helpless and at the whisper of a post-Freudian permissiveness that hovered about Jasper's irritable reproach. The trick of superimposing modern notions on premodern situations is a familiar device—a *New Yorker* cartoon device, one is tempted to say. It is in keeping with the style of the production to the extent that Rupert Holmes's *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is a send-up of the conventions of Victorian melodrama. Conceived as a rough-and-tumble production staged by a company of third-rate actors at a Victorian music hall, *Edwin Drood* presents itself as an adaptation at (at least) one remove from art. Thus, instead of playing John Jasper at the Imperial Theatre Howard McGillin plays a "Mr. Clive Paget" performing the role of John Jasper; instead of playing Dickens's heroine, Patti Cohenour plays a certain "Miss Deirdre Peregrine" performing the role of Rosa Bud; instead of playing the hero, Betty Buckley impersonates the company's "principal boy," a "Miss Alice Nutting," while George Rose becomes a "Mr. Thomas Cartwright," the company manager. The audience meanwhile, is asked to consider itself a rowdy, vocal middle-class audience congregated at The Music Hall Royale in London in 18___.

The device of actors-playing-actors-putting-on-a-show is also familiar and fashionably in keeping with the current preference for meta-theater as opposed to theater. One felt this summer that its purpose was at least in part to excuse *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* from being a better musical than it is by means of the disarming trick of celebrating its own vacuity. Still, the overall effect was to send us out loving theater—which is, after all, the function of a Joe Papp crowd-pleaser. The real-life company moved between Dickens's characters and those of the fictive actors who portray them with a charmingly flippant versatility and skill worlds apart from the effortful and self-congratulatory style of performance that characterizes so much of New York theater, accomplishing so little.

Lovingly produced and performed in Central Park, *Edwin Drood* was an unabashedly *Ersatz* musical with no shame and no pretensions to being anything else. At the Imperial Theatre on Broadway it is not substantially different. There have been some modifications made to accommodate the transfer to an indoor venue and also, it would appear, to accommodate certain criticisms made by Frank Rich in *The New York Times* this summer. But actually the most qualitative difference between the two productions resulted from a circumstance over which no one had any control: the death in late September of a comic actor and playwright named Larry Shue. At the time of his death, in an airplane crash, Mr. Shue was in a fair way to becoming a sort of apostle of High Silliness around the New York stage, and I know I'm not the only worshipper at that particular altar who will miss his antic disposition. There was an Ealing-comedy sweetness to his foolery both in *Drood* and in his own play, *The Foreigner,* and it would take better actors than George N. Martin to replace him.

Even without Mr. Shue, the primary charm of *Edwin Drood* still lies in the performances of individual members of the company, and it is still a knowing and goodnaturedly oafish misrepresentation of Literature. In fact, the adaptation's relationship to its source is probably the most interesting thing about it. Dickens's last novel is a curiously dark, brooding, and almost pessimistic work. The musical-comedy version is perforce irrepressibly lighthearted and lightminded. That it manages to bring us to a spot not far from where Dickens would have

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wanted us to be *vis-à-vis* the themes in his novel is largely due, I think, to the fact that Dickens himself, in *Edwin Drood,* was being most unlike himself.

Of course, the issue of Dickens's intentions in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* amounts to a great question mark; for having presented us with a situation, a set of themes, and characters, the disappearance of one of those characters and an incipient inquiry into an apparent villainy, the narrative breaks off without resolving any of the questions, conflicts or plots it has set in motion. The story takes place in the fictional cathedral town of Cloisterham and revolves around two sets of characters. The main plot concerns John Jasper, his nephew Edwin Drood, and Edwin's fiancée Rosa Bud, and largely turns on the triangular relationship between them; for although Edwin is formally contracted to Rosa, he is not in love with her while Jasper, a minor functionary in the cathedral, scarcely six years Edwin's senior, secretly is. Rosa, for her part, while she is quite fond of her childhood playmate, is no more in love with Edwin than he with her but hates and fears his uncle. Particularly striking is the intense and rather morbid love that seems to characterize Jasper's attitude toward his nephew, a love that is met on Edwin's part with a sincere affection somewhat off-hand in outward manner. An early subplot introduces the eminently affable Reverend Septimus Crisparkle, minor canon of the cathedral, and two newcomers to Cloisterham: an impetuous young man from Ceylon named Neville Landless, whose education Mr. Crisparkle has undertaken, and Neville's twin sister Helena, at school in town with Rosa. Plot and subplot meet when Neville Landless falls in love with Rosa and Edwin takes a strong fancy to Neville's sister. There is a falling out between the two young men which Jasper foments and publicizes under the guise of seeking a reconciliation. Shortly thereafter (and after Edwin and Rosa have privately agreed to break off their engagement) Edwin disappears. We never see him again, but no body is found; and midway through the finished portion of the novel a new character arrives in Cloisterham, presenting himself as "Dick Datchery." He seems to come from nowhere and to be greatly interested in the circumstances of young Drood's disappearance: to be, in fact (as the scholarly parlance puts it), "heavily in disguise." It is at this point in the narrative—just when Datchery seems to have made an important discovery but before Dickens had apprised the reader of what it was—that Dickens died.

The first three numbers of *Drood* appeared in the April, May, and June issues of *All the Year Round* in 1870. Dickens's editor and biographer, John Forster, went on to publish the following installments in the last three numbers of that year and people have been trying to work out how the novel would have ended ever since. It is in its own sense of an ending that the present production's primary gimmick is lodged. Toward the end of the evening (as everyone will by now have heard) the issue of a resolution is thrown open to a company and audience-participation vote on such questions as whether Drood would have turned out to be alive or dead and the respective identities of "Dick Datchery" and Drood's assailant. Thus, the audience at the Imperial Theatre can make its mark on history and join generations of scholars in considering whether Dickens put in that early bit about Helena Landless once having "dressed as a boy" and "shown the daring of a man" because he meant for Dick Datchery to be revealed as Helena in disguise, or, alternatively, whether the character Dickens had in mind for the job was Bazzard, the theatrically minded clerk whose absence, toward the middle of the book, is so inconspicuously noted by his employer. Members of a Broadway audience can register their convictions as to whether Edwin Drood was murdered by his uncle Jasper, the dope-smoking church organist, whether he got bumped off by his beribboned sweetheart, rubbed out by the ungovernable Neville Landless or his inscrutable sister, the opium-ridden hag Princess Puffer, whose den of iniquity Jasper frequents in London, or the

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Reverend Mr. Crisparkle, who seems so generously disposed toward his fellowman.

"Professor Plum; in the conservatory; with the lead pipe." It is all a little like a live game of Clue performed by an unusually talented group of Oxford undergraduates as an end-of-term garden production. The most interesting aspect of the voting procedure, however, is the way it seems designed to steer the audience away from the correct solution. For there is in Dickens's unfinished novel no mystery at all about the murderer's identity. It is not even an issue. Whether in fact a crime has been successfully committed, who "Dick Datchery" would have turned out to be, and why the Princess Puffer seems to be pursuing Jasper so relentlessly are all questions open to speculation and debate. They have been argued back and forth by *Drood* scholars and enthusiasts for over a hundred years: argued on the basis of remarks that Dickens is reported to have made to his illustrators, editor, and members of his family; argued on the basis of analytical interpretations of the cover illustration for the book; argued on the basis of Dickens's rough notes for the novel and on his behavior over a similarly plotted mystery story whose publication he had agreed to undertake in *All the Year Round*; argued on the basis of the mechanics of his methods of production and the shades of his character (was he capable of lying? of cheating? of forgetting or changing his mind?) as well as on the internal "evidence" of how various eligible male and female characters were to be matched up. What is never in any doubt is the issue of John Jasper's guilt.

Audiences for the Broadway musical will want to know how this can be and where the reader's interest in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* can possibly lie. For, as George Rose points out when he reviews the case for us before the voting, the first cardinal rule of the mystery genre is that the obvious suspect should never turn out to be the murderer. "Could this," he speculates aloud, "be all there is to *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*? That John Jasper murdered his nephew in a vain attempt to win the love of Rosa Bud?" He

KENNETH SNELSON PARIS PANORAMAS

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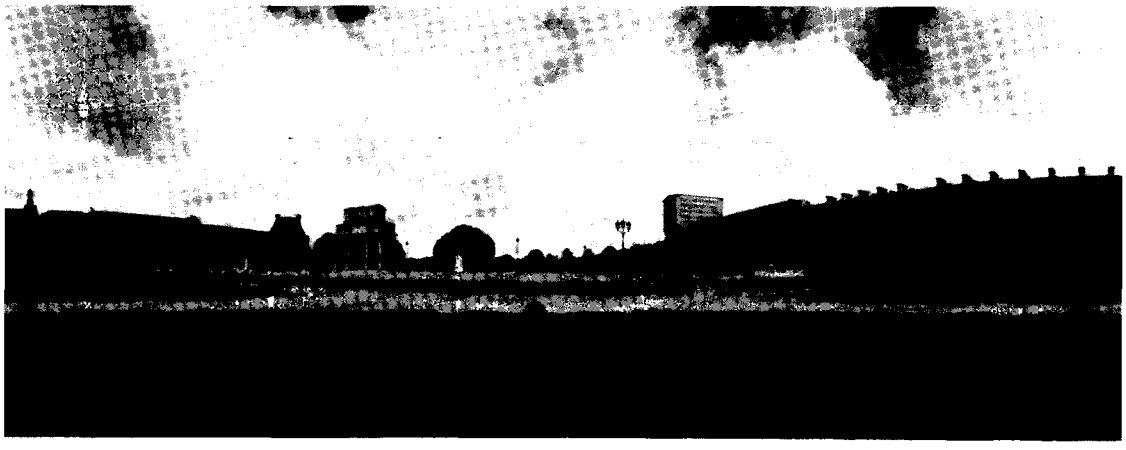
pauses for effect. "Where then the mystery?" It is a good joke but not exactly a fair question. For the rule that the prime suspect should never turn out to be the murderer belongs to the "whodunit," a form that really only crystallized into a recognizable genre during the 1920s and '30s.

The English "country-house" mystery in which the reader is invited to pit his wits against the author's and race a detective-hero to the solution to a crime is a genre of which the reader has certain fixed expectations: that a murder will be committed, for instance, and that a culprit will emerge from within the highly circumscribed society of characters the novel has presented. But the culprit in Edgar Allen Poe's 1841 "Murders in the Rue Morgue" turns out to be a passing orangutan. The Victorian mystery was not primarily a "whodunit." Accordingly, it need not adhere to any of the conventions of that form.

The modern mystery reader expects to be made privy to all the information the detective has at his disposal: it is perhaps the form's most unassailable convention. In modern detective-fiction narrative ingenuity therefore lies in the tightrope line the author has to walk between judicious exposition and blatant disclosure—a balance he best achieves by having the solution turn on some question of hidden motivation—hidden because it has been established in, say, an incident or scene or snatch of dialogue that the reader can be expected to disregard because it seems to fulfill another narrative function. It is a matter of giving an ambiguous or misleading weight to facts by creating the impression that they are there for other reasons. The Victorian mystery story felt no such obligation to the reader. Poe and Conan Doyle both typically offer their clues with their solutions; and the "how did he know I had come from Afghanistan" trick—a game in which both Poe and Conan Doyle indulged *ad nauseam*—is characteristic of their approach to exposition. We cannot hazard a guess as to Holmes's reasons for identifying an approaching stranger as "a retired sergeant of the marines" because



Paris, Le Louvre, 1984. 9½ × 50½ inches.

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we only get a description of the man when Holmes explains.

The detective-hero of the modern mystery novel embodies a triumph of order in the notion of a retributive justice. But then detective fiction, as it emerged from the England of the years between the wars, is an innately conservative genre and everything about the form reflects this—particularly the importance of rules. Its inevitable corpse acknowledges the possibility of malice in a predictable (and therefore manageable) form; and its inevitable hero posits among fictional men an intelligence that seems to make the real world safe for human frailty—like that of the foolish reader who, after all, has let his attention be distracted from the object at hand. Even the emphasis on motive in modern mysteries expresses a belief in the ability of things to be explained. In the second half of the nineteenth century the mystery has no such reassuring subtext. On the contrary, its hero is an almost macabre figure, more inspiring of awe than confidence. (One thinks of Holmes's drug-addiction and, before that, of Dupin's pathological reclusiveness.) The nineteenth-century thriller strove to extend the limits of the horrific-conceivable, not by discovering new reasons for the evil that men do but by inventing new and ingenious ways for it to manifest itself in. Accordingly, the Victorian mystery was generally far more interested in *how* than *by whom* something was to be done.

How had the orangutan effected its escape from the house in the rue Morgue? And how had Dr. Grimesby Roylott destroyed his stepdaughter with a "speckled band"? How was the purloined letter to be located and rendered harmless? And how was a scandal in Bohemia to be prevented? Only one Victorian mystery posits a crime and a limited number of people who can have committed it and even *The Moonstone* is really more interested in mechanics than motivation: someone has indeed taken the jewel, but not a villain. There is indeed a villain, but it is not the thief. Collins's riddle is lodged primarily in the question of how a crime could be committed unconsciously.

For over fifty years the mystery story remains more preoccupied with the phenomenology of means than that of villainy or motivation; and for much of that time we know who the villains are. We know right from the beginning of *The Woman in White* that Sir Percival Glyde is a nasty fellow. We know exactly what he plans to do: Collins sees to it that we know by constantly changing the narrative voice so that the reader always knows more than whoever is telling the story at any given moment. Similarly, in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* Dickens uses dramatic irony to let the reader in on the secret of John Jasper's character.

There are things we know about Edwin Drood's uncle Jasper that no one else knows but Dickens. We know that a curious expression comes over Jasper's face whenever he looks at Edwin, "a look of hungry, exacting, watchful, and yet devoted affection." We know that he tries to give his nephew some kind of "warning." We know that Edwin is capable of causing his uncle great pain, albeit unwittingly, when he speaks disparagingly of his engagement with Rosa or unthinkingly contrasts himself with Jasper. We know that Jasper provokes a quarrel between Edwin and Neville Landless and, just prior to Edwin's disappearance, arranges for the two young men to be together at a particular time in a particular place—a circumstance he takes great care to make known. We see his efforts, after the disappearance, to pin a murder charge on Landless. Finally, we hear Jasper babbling half-consciously to the opium woman about something he did "over and over again" in his mind, something he did "so often, and through such vast expanses of time, that when it was really done it seemed not worth the doing, it was done so soon."

That Jasper has fantasized about killing his nephew and thinks he has actually done so is clear. (Only one study of *Edwin Drood* I know of questions Jasper's guilt and it reads like the Thurber story about the woman who "solves" the murder of Duncan.) One thing we don't know about the murder is "how?": it isn't clear what Jasper planned to

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do to Edwin and thinks he has done (although the cathedral tower and the quicklime in the cathedral crypt seem to figure prominently in his thoughts). The other thing we don't know is "why?"

The explanation that dominates the literature on *Drood*—that Jasper secretly hates Edwin because he covets Rosa—simply will not do. One could not write an interesting novel about so one-dimensional a crime and *Edwin Drood* is a very interesting book. Besides, the killing of Edwin Drood as a crime of cold passion would be an incident totally unrelated to any of the things that the novel seems elsewhere to be about. More than anything else, it is about a particular kind of inexplicable misery and discontent—inexplicable because they seem to have no rational or objective cause. Discontent is everywhere in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood.* It hovers about Rosa, who cannot put her finger on exactly what is lacking in her relationship with Edwin. It hovers about Bazzard, the gloomy clerk in Rosa's guardian's offices in London. It hovers about the mean little house that Jasper visits in London, where whispers of unforgotten visions are murmured unintelligibly in opium dreams. Most memorably, perhaps, it hovers about John Jasper himself, the twenty-six-year-old choirmaster and organist of Cloisterham Cathedral, who has gained a position of such comparative prominence and respectability at so early an age and hates his life.

> "How does our service sound to you? . . . It often sounds to me quite devilish . . . . The echoes of my own voice among the arches seem to mock me with my daily drudging round. No wretched monk who droned his life away in that gloomy place before me can have been more tired of it than I am. He could take for relief (and did take) to carving demons out of the stalls and seats and desks. What shall I do? Must I take to carving them out of my heart?"

"Who could have told, by looking at Mr. Grewgious," Dickens wrote of Rosa's guardian, "whether he had ever known ambition or disappointment!" He had explored the theme of discontent before: *Great Expectations* is really a novel about great disappointments. But always before unhappiness had been seen as a condition proceeding from something else. We knew what occasioned the bitterness of a Miss Havisham or a Pip and had reasons of our own for feeling bitter on behalf of characters who—like Joe Gargery and Abel Magwitch—seemed incapable of feeling owed or cheated of anything by life. In *Edwin Drood* the bitterness and discontent are there, it seems, without the causes that should explain and justify them. We don't really know why poor, doomed Neville Landless should resent the world so bitterly. We don't know why Durdles, the stonemason, should find it necessary to confront life in a state of liquor-sodden stupefaction, or why the "hideous small boy" they call "Deputy" wants to hurl stones at everyone he sees. What is remarkable in *Edwin Drood* is the pessimism with which darkness seems to stand divorced from any notion of causality: violence and unhappiness here are something for which no explanation is required. Which was, I believe, to have been the whole point: motiveless violence. There is no practical or objective reason why Jasper should want to murder Edwin. It would have profited him nothing. (It wouldn't increase his chances with Rosa, given the way she feels about him, which is what makes the standard interpretation so silly.) The killing of Edwin Drood was to have been a motiveless crime. He was in fact to have been carving a demon out of his very heart.

Wilkie Collins, in *The Moonstone,* had explored the possibility of motiveless crime in the form of unconscious action. It must have been a pretty frightening notion, that under the influence of opium you could commit a crime you didn't want to commit, hadn't meant to commit, and didn't know you'd committed. How much more frightening, though, was the notion Dickens was exploring here, of motiveless violence committed under the influence of an *internal* force: ambivalence. The Victorian mystery

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aims at raising demons, and one of the demons Dickens raised in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is ambivalence. It is the only other thing besides hypocrisy that makes a man's actions sometimes belie his words—and Jasper isn't a hypocrite; he genuinely loves his "dear boy." He also hates him, though, and not for Rosa's sake. It is for something in Edwin himself—a kind of complacency and arrogance, a smugness and air of easy self-assurance that make him impervious to any kind of real human passion or suffering. The strange thing is that Jasper isn't the only one who hates Edwin Drood: Dickens hated him, too.

The Papp production seems to recognize this. Betty Buckley's performance as Drood is a caricature, a send-up of the Dickensian hero. But that is how Dickens wrote the character: Edwin Drood is no one. He is a cipher: the stock nineteenth-century hero—the Nicholas Nickleby figure, the David Copperfield figure, the Charles Darnay figure, the young man about whom we know no more than how he fares at the rest of the world's hands and that he is upright and moral. Jasper is neither upright nor moral in strict Victorian terms (he has improper thoughts about a nice girl like Rosa) and yet, when set beside the fact of Jasper's unhappiness, the upright hero becomes a rather hateful fellow. Edwin glides through the book disappointing people and making them unhappy. He disappoints Jasper, he disappoints Neville, he disappoints Rosa, he even disappoints Rosa's guardian.

Most of all, he seems to disappoint Dickens. In August of 1869, just as Dickens was getting to work on *Edwin Drood,* he wrote to John Forster about "a very curious and new idea" that he had for his new novel: "Not a communicable idea (or the interest of the story would be gone), but a very strong one, though difficult to work." There has been a good deal of speculation as to precisely what Dickens might have regarded as "a very curious and new idea." Some say it was to bring his hero back from the dead. Some say it was to have his hero's murderer brought to justice by a woman in drag. I think it was the idea of killing off the conventional Victorian hero: killing him off not so much in the sense of having him die in the course of the novel, but in making us feel that he deserves to. It doesn't really matter in the end whether Dickens meant for Edwin Drood to be alive or dead. For even if he had returned, it would have been with a changed aspect, having learned something about grief and darkness. Even if he had lived he would have had to have become a different Edwin Drood.

Of course, the upright Victorian hero was a Dickensian character (if not a Dickensian invention) but one that, I suspect—a little like Algernon's Bunbury—had outlived his usefulness to his creator and therefore had to die. Dickens could see the end now; perhaps he had also come to see the fundamental callowness of the conventional Victorian hero. Respectability had become one of his own great disappointments: his marriage had broken up ten years before and "household harmony" was now just something he could no longer name a magazine. In his relationship with Ellen Ternan, moreover—a woman the age of his daughters—he had for some time been, like Jasper, a suitor to inappropriate love.

Which isn't to say that Dickens approves of Jasper or condones his conduct or behavior. I think Dickens—again, like Jasper—was genuinely torn on the issue of Edwin Drood. Morally, he could not sympathize with Jasper (or condone his making passionate love to Rosa by the sundial in the garden), but novelistically he seems to. At any rate, he seems unable to keep us from doing so. All Jasper wanted, after all, was Rosa; unfortunately, he shouldn't have her; but even her guardian has to admit that wanting Rosa is not a crime.

In this regard, the Broadway musical of *Edwin Drood* is curiously felicitous. Where Rupert Holmes goes wrong (and can't really help doing so) is in musical-comedyizing everything. Gone is all the darkness and sadness that pervade the novel. What he gets right, though, he gets righter than any of

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those cultists and scholars. Unlike theirs, in his version—as in Dickens's—it is Jasper we really care and wonder about. The fact that this is so is probably more the result of the passage of time than anything else. *Drood* scholarship itself has been a little buried in the vestiges of a Victorian morality that judges Jasper's bad habits and improper longings more harshly even than Dickens. It isn't that Rupert Holmes is a literary critic so much as that John Jasper is simply a villain whose time has finally come.

He fares pretty well, on the whole, in the current production. Given the lobbying that George Rose does before the election, I'd be surprised if Jasper is ever accused of murder. Still, I don't imagine he ever gets his girl. But one night this fall, when the votes were all in and the murderer had been carted off, when "Dick Datchery" had been unmasked and neither Jasper nor Rosa had anything in particular to do, I thought I saw Howard McGillin and Patti Cohenour migrate toward each other and embrace affectionately as actors sometimes will before the grand finale of a big, informal musical. It was hard to make out through the meta-theatrical haze exactly what was happening—whether I was seeing Jasper with Rosa or "Mr. Paget" with "Miss Peregrine" or even Mr. McGillin and Miss Cohenour (who, after all, have worked together before). But I couldn't help thinking for a moment—though it was only a wish—that Rosa had had a change of heart and poor Jasper had at long last found bliss.

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Art

Donatello as curator's choice

by Creighton Gilbert

"Donatello was one of the greatest artists who ever lived." That remark—made in a speech at the Detroit Institute of Arts in connection with a recent exhibition of Donatello's sculpture—would elicit nothing more than "of course" from anybody familiar with the context, that is, with "sculpture through the ages." It's like saying Tolstoy was one of the greatest writers. But Donatello is less familiar, so the statement doesn't seem quite as much of a truism. The reasons for this are many. For one thing, among the major arts, sculpture has the least impact on general modern culture. Because of its being mostly monochrome, and because of the problem of multiple views that photography cannot solve, sculpture has trouble getting absorbed into the museum without walls of coffee-table books. (Books on Donatello have consistently tried to compensate with hype, photographs taken from improbable angles, and nervous cropping.) Film could solve these problems, but art films have generally stayed with painting, because of the cost. Sculpture has been further disadvantaged, in the case of large-scale work like most of Donatello's, by its immobility, which usually limits it to its original site—to the museum with walls, as it were. And then, too, sculpture doesn't as often become a commodity for auctions or for collectors, unless one has a park like Versailles or Pepsico. The few sculptors who are on the usual lists of the most famous masters are better known for the painting they also did, like Michelangelo, or they have produced multiples, like Rodin, or are purely literary names anyway, like Phidias.

The Detroit exhibition—entitled "Italian Renaissance Sculpture in the Time of Donatello"[1]—presented seventy-eight sculptures and fourteen works on paper. Only four of them were definitively by Donatello, although several more were "attributed" to him, which means that their authenticity is still a matter of debate. There was one work in Detroit, however, which presented Donatello's greatness fully, without asterisks. This was the bust of San Rossore in gilded bronze, lent from Pisa. Even on specialists it made a powerful impression, since its usual installation in Pisa, where they had seen it before, is not calculated to bring out its quality. The sculpture's purpose was not aesthetic; it was made as a reliquary, to be the container of the saint's actual head. At the time it was traditional to produce such works in the shape of heads, and Donatello retains the basic qualities of older ones. Of these qualities, there is one that seems to

1 "Italian Renaissance Sculpture in the Time of Donatello" will be on view at the Detroit Institute of Arts until January 6; from there it will travel to the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas (February 17-April 27). The exhibition was organized by Alan P. Darr, the Curator of European Sculpture and Decorative Art at the Detroit Institute. The catalogue (268 pages, $22) was published by the Institute.

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escape mention in the scholarly commentaries, perhaps because it is so primal—the strict frontality, as of a mask. The bust of San Rossore is an icon, like a Byzantine Madonna. But of course this formula did not limit Donatello, for the head is also a study of one man's character, signaling the experienced life with a concentration we associate with the great tragedies. In the bust of San Rossore we see a unique person through particulars—through the active modeling relationships that his bone structure and flesh surface have developed. These are all the more noticeable when measured against the mask's geometric essence. Some famous icons of modern culture are comparable, such as the best-known image of Beethoven, but that is more abstract than this, giving more weight to the mask and its flattish design. A better analogy is the self-portrait of Goya, similar to the Beethoven (perhaps because both men communicated across the barrier of deafness) but much more alive, as one would expect from one of the great masters in the broad Donatellian tradition.

One way of focusing on Donatello's distinction is to observe him as a key to the formation of the Renaissance in Florence, always agreed to be one of the most extraordinary loci of our culture. A bold means of distinguishing the Florentine Renaissance from others, but one that seems to work, is through its central concern with approaching the human condition on a human level, without idealization or abstraction. We more often associate this approach with the novel and the drama. The Florentine artists dealt with it by representing both isolated figures, as in Donatello's statues, and groups, as in his reliefs. These groups are most often presented at climactic moments in the dramas of their relations, and in this respect they coincide with the figures presented by the painters who were part of the same Florentine development. Among the masters of this approach, Donatello has perhaps more to do than any other with the status of his city as the primary place for artists. His great predecessor in Florence a hundred years before, the painter Giotto, certainly was more extraordinary in pioneering this concern for the human condition, but he was always locked in rivalry for general leadership with the very different great artists of nearby Siena, and Siena was no longer a factor in Donatello's time. A hundred years after Donatello, Michelangelo made this concern blend with others, in his case with the superhumanity of his protagonists; later artists, of course, worked out other mixes. The direct line of Giotto and Donatello does emerge in great individual artists—such as Caravaggio, Rembrandt, Goya, and Daumier—but all these are noticeably eccentric with respect to the primary direction of taste in their own places and times.

Donatello's Florence was also extraordinary in that in one short generation it produced four great sculptors, of whom he was the youngest. These included Brunelleschi in his youth (before he switched to architecture), Ghiberti, and the short-lived Nanni di Banco, who is less famous. The exhibition in Detroit did not include any work that is definitively by these three, though it made valiant gestures. Among the works indisputably by Donatello there were two small sculptures that illustrated, in different fascinating ways, a concern of Donatello's that is unusual among sculptors: his heightened attention, not only to the real space around his figures, but to a figure's relationship to the viewer's position, action, and optical activity. One work is the small marble relief from Boston of the Madonna in the clouds. It is produced with minute gradations of very slight relief, marked more by incision than by carving, yet evoking an effect of recession into a distance so open that it allows for infinity. Later artists who have tried this, notably Augustus Saint-Gaudens, give an effect that hardly goes beyond that of incised drawings. Donatello and some of the other Florentines found an analogue for the atmospheric depth of the painters of their city. The luminosity of the marble was one aid. A more important one was the establishing of a central foreground form, here Mary's head, which is

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in relatively high relief and sharply separate from the rest; indeed, it is almost as icon-like as San Rossore.

Another small work in the show has an even more complex relation to its viewers. It is a foot-high bronze of an angel playing a tambourine and making a spiral turn with its whole body. It was made to be part of a complex structure, a baptismal font, which is hexagonal. It stood on the top, at one of the sixty-degree corners. Thus, there is no one front view. The figure wants us to move around it, and on to five other similar figures. Its pose in motion is a vector for our circular motion. Now separated from its context, the sculpture continues to work as a single figure with the balanced dynamism of a dancer; this is in line with Donatello's equally strong commitment to bodily truth.

Even the most imposing work by Donatello in the Detroit exhibition, the San Rossore, is simple and small relative to the average of the artist's other works. Thus what we have here is really just a few minor Donatellos. Do we have what such an exhibition ought to have? In one sense, it will be urged, there is more here than could be expected. These days owners simply will not lend such things. But if this condition is a given, could it have been reasonable to embark on such an enterprise in the first place? Clearly the show really does not intend to serve what might once have been assumed to be the natural purpose of a one-man show, that is, to allow us to look at a whole career of achievement and define a personality. That just doesn't happen anymore, this exhibition seems to say. But is that the case? Just last year we had the Caravaggio show at the Metropolitan Museum, which was on a different plane in this regard. It did not present the large-scale works of the artist, but it did show us his whole range through time so that we could see an evolution. The difference between that show and this is not a matter of fragility: canvases are certainly more subject to damage in transit than small bronzes, the medium of the majority of sculptures in Detroit. Rather the difference would seem to be administrative: the Caravaggio show was displayed both in Italy and in this country, as the Donatello show was not, and so the former could persuade more Italian authorities to lend.

But perhaps, after all, an alternative kind of exhibition was not something the organizers worried about too much. The exhibition does not so much seek to present an allover effect as to provide an opportunity to specialists for viewing individual works that they have not been able to see before, or for comparing groups of two or three works, so that decisions can be made on matters of disputed authorship and other specialist-problems. In my own case, it was very satisfying to be able to substitute a visit to Detroit for journeys I had never made to the museums of Lille and Rennes in France. Lille owns one of the few marble reliefs off the beaten track (of art historical travel) that have been assigned to Donatello's hand; Rennes owns a drawing that a scholar in 1968 first proposed to attribute to Donatello: it would be his only known drawing. In Detroit we could look at these objects and make our own judgments, necessarily tentative. The specialists generally seemed to place both of these works somewhere below their previous status.

The authorship and artistic value of a large group of baked clay (terra-cotta) Madonnas and similar works in the show was a more complex issue. These works are the subject of a very recent argument, one that got its first full-scale presentation in the catalogue of the exhibition. They are proposed to be very early works of Donatello's. In an accompanying lecture, the author of the hypothesis, Luciano Bellosi of the University of Siena, was able to persuade his audience that they are quite beautiful, which is something, since it has been generally held that terra-cotta was a medium for lesser artists, who made objects for a cheaper market and worked in the orbit of the major masters. But he was not able to convince me, for one, that the works are as early as he proposes. One of them shows formulas spun off from more mature works by Ghiberti,

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the artist who has usually been called the major inspirer of their style. But at that later date they could not be Donatello's, since only the assignment to his first youth makes the theory possible at all; his later evolution is very well known and quite different. Mr. Bellosi was also effective in making a close comparison between a known Ghiberti and one of these terra-cottas, the result being that it didn't look so much like that artist after all. But he did not offer the analogous confrontation with a known Donatello. (He limited himself to details—a gesture here, a profile there.) I suspect that, if he had, these terra-cotta works would have looked enough unlike Donatello to send us right back to Ghiberti. They would have seemed, in short, really to be by minor artists using an average Florentine approach derived from both Donatello and Ghiberti—a conclusion that is consistent with their medium.

As in this case, the lectures that marked the opening of the exhibition concentrated on specific issues about particular works, or on the later artists included in the show, some little known. Often the lectures had only an indirect relation to the material at hand. Hardly any took up larger questions that might naturally have been provoked by the exhibition. This oddity is worth thinking about, since very interesting ideas about Donatello are in the air these days. They are being generated by a number of young scholars, many of whom were in fact in the audience in Detroit. These included Bonnie Bennett and David Wilkins, whose book on Donatello was published last year by Phaidon. Another scholar present was Robert Munman, the author of a recent study on the angle of vision from which, he argues, Donatello meant his work to be seen. Munman's impressive new photographs, as well as his text, will make it necessary to take his proposals into account.

The exhibition's own style quality, as it were, was evinced not only by its choices among potential speakers but also by the catalogue's comments on what problems remain to be addressed by specialists in Donatello. These turn out to be still other

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individual problems. From that fact we may infer that the absence of general explorations—beyond the catalogue's ten-page introductory essay—was not a felt lack. Hence, further, the kind of exhibition that it was possible to make would appear to have been what was felt to be the right one to make. Certainly it had many pleasures, if more for the very specialized curator than for the general public. Certainly, too, the concepts of such exhibitions will receive more and more articulate debate.

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Two sculptors

by Eric Gibson

New sculpture, which is attracting more and more attention at the moment, doesn't have the unity, the uniformity that painting does (or that it did until recently). You can't come up with a single term, like Neo-Expressionism, to describe what is going on; there's too much diversity. A measure of this diversity was visible last fall in two gallery exhibitions. In October, Donald Lipski's recent work was on view at the Germans van Eck Gallery in SoHo, and in November there was a show of William Tucker's work at the David McKee Gallery on Fifty-Seventh Street.

Of the two, Lipski is the more eccentric. He works with discarded industrial objects, a method favored by another prominent contemporary sculptor, R. M. Fischer. Whereas Fischer's found objects are subsumed in a larger whole—a lamp, for example, functions as a work of art and utilitarian object—Lipski inhabits the realm of art more explicitly. But he rejects conventional artistic order in favor of a loose separateness, combining his objects in a way that stresses their uniqueness. In one work, a pair of heavy rubber boots rests on two metal conveyor belts. Each boot is crowned by a heavy-duty wooden handle, and the pair is joined by copper rods passed through the lace holes. In another work, a bucket is fitted inside with a reflective disc, and wrapped with a plaster-soaked bandage. Out of such combinations a whole of a different sort emerges: the "poetic object."

The aesthetic of the poetic object has been consistently present throughout modern art. Its roots lie in Surrealism, and it has made regular appearances ever since, notably in the work of Joseph Cornell, Jasper Johns, and, most recently, Lucas Samaras. By emphasizing the non-literal and allusive, it stands in opposition to the strain of positivism running through modern art, which locates aesthetic experience in the materials of artistic creation. The operating idea behind the "poetic object" is that by removing an object from its usual context we can be made to look at it in a new way. Since the newly isolated object will often appear strange, the first step toward an art of pure association has already been taken. It remains for the artist to continue this process by transposing the object into a new context arrived at through operations of his own. He may combine it with other objects, or he may prefer a more direct variety of intervention, like painting it. In either case, the aim is to charge objects with a new meaning that is more "real" inasmuch as it springs from the realm of the unconscious.

Working in this tradition, Lipski gives each group of new work an overall title—in this case, *Building Steam*. Besides imposing unity, the title moves his sculpture further from everyday reality and into the realm of the metaphysical. Within the context of the poetic object, however, Lipski uses his found materials for different purposes. At times the finished product will achieve an

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uncharacteristic formal unity, looking oddly familiar yet ultimately indecipherable. In *Building Steam #379*, for example, a "needle" penetrates an aluminum "doughnut," the "needle" itself having been assembled from assorted electrical parts. Elsewhere, Lipski aims for something more subversive, by denying or inverting the functionalism of utilitarian objects. A saw blade will be meticulously bandaged, making it useless for cutting. A pick will have a "handle" of glass rods, making it impossible to wield. Three scythes will be joined so their blades form a circle and their handles radiate outward. At other times irony will be the goal. An old, leather-bound volume entitled *The Book of Knowledge* will have a wide hole drilled through it, the idea no doubt being that the book is "empty" of real knowledge. Similarly, Lipski will hang a small, compartmentalized box on the wall like a display case or a medicine cabinet. What happens to be "available" here are numerous tiny "bombs," one to a compartment.

There is a problem in all this, however. None of Lipski's objects has any life outside itself. None of his assemblages resonates with that vital associativeness that gives sculpture of this kind its *raison d'être*. Lipski's growing reputation derives, I think, from the fact that he is the first artist in some time to work in this manner rather than from any real mastery of it. There is a sizable leap from the amusement afforded by incongruous, displaced objects to the poetry one can achieve by manipulating them. It is a leap Lipski seems unable to make. Too much of his work partakes of simplistic, schoolboy humor—*The Book of Knowledge* is an example—or simply makes no sense at all.

But there is another problem here as well, and that is that Lipski is, in a sense, missing his own point. Often his arrangements do not even bespeak amused detachment—the recognition of the queer attractiveness, the ugly-duckling potential of a thing plucked from its context. Rather, they manifest loving *attachment*. He's fascinated by his materials, the particular beauty of mass-produced, utilitarian objects, and it always gets in the way. He becomes the boy hobbyist, now grown up, who wanders wide-eyed through the hardware store smitten by the strangely shaped, gleaming bits all about him. You can see this fascination in his multiple use of the same object in one work—a scythe, with its graphic, gestural silhouette; an empty shell casing, its sleek, machined tube form devoid of any intimations of mortality.

The loving attachment shows most clearly in Lipski's wrapping of his objects. To be sure, wrapping is a way of embellishing a work, of bringing out its formal qualities and, of course, of making a personal "mark" on it. But he's like a man who can't stop polishing his car. He's so taken with a form that he can't let go. It's not enough to make it part of something, he wants to celebrate it, caress it. Wrapping is Lipski's way of expressing deep feeling within an aesthetic of detachment. Occasionally there will be a foray into the political realm, such as *Building Steam #333* (the piece with the tiny bombs), but it's never convincing. He's too in love with the objects themselves to be able to conceive so mundane a use for them as politics. He's too much of an aesthete to be persuasively political—or even successfully ironic or subversive, for that matter.

Lipski's combinations don't work because he's too mired in the beauty of each individual object to be able to concoct a sufficiently vibrant grouping. A form will be so distinct—eccentric-looking, well-turned, or both—as to almost demand isolation. And yet, of course, if poetry is to be realized on any level at all, objects must be combined in a suggestive fashion. The real irony in Lipski's work, therefore, lies in this quandary, and the fact that it is never resolved accounts for the empty, occasionally silly character of the work.

William Tucker inhabits a more familiar landscape than Donald Lipski does, but Tucker's age, nationality, and intellectual outlook combine to give his sculpture a distinctive character. At fifty, Tucker is almost a generation older than his colleagues garner-

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ing their first attentions just now. And as an Englishman who has lived in the United States since 1977, his artistic roots are not here, but in the postwar artistic milieu of England, in particular the style of open-form, constructed sculpture that evolved during the Sixties at the St. Martin's School of Art in London in reaction to the monumental figure style of Henry Moore. In addition, Tucker possesses a larger overview than most. In 1974 he published *Early Modern Sculpture,* a study of Rodin, Degas, Matisse, Brancusi, Picasso, and Gonzalez, and he has lectured, published, and organized exhibitions on both sides of the Atlantic. All this gives his work a depth and perspective almost nonexistent elsewhere.

Tucker's new work at the McKee Gallery, entitled *The Gymnasts,* consisted of three bronze, inflected, L-shaped forms, each roughly seven feet in height, whose vertical and horizontal members were bent, arched, and cantilevered in configurations that communicated—abstractly—a sense of the twists and turns of a human body operating in opposition to gravity. Three working drawings were also included.

Taken as a whole, the work continued Tucker's move away from his style of the late Seventies and early Eighties, evident in works such as *The Hostage,* where a closed K-shape contains faced rows of horizontal projections, or "teeth." That work suggested duress and containment—powerfully so, since at over eight feet in height it was scaled to the upright human body. Generally such pieces possessed a formal clarity and a direct, near-literal physical presence that belied their elusiveness, the dense weave of meaning and association they contained.

By contrast, *The Gymnasts* are lighter, more accessible. Despite their abstraction—their lack of direct portrayal of a figure—one felt at once that they addressed themselves to bodily motion in space. Tucker has turned here to a mode of sculptural expression almost entirely abandoned by ambitious sculptors for a generation: the carved or modeled monolith that rises to confront the viewer in an attitude of heroic or semi-heroic address. This new idiom shows Tucker's affinity with the artists covered in his book, Rodin in particular. His subject reveals this affinity as well, for both Rodin and Degas made use of the moving, gravity-defying figure in motion in their art. Tucker's ambition is thus to renew and redirect the art of sculpture by returning it to its modernist sources. "I feel that we have become so distracted by the external possibilities of sculpture in our time," he has recently written, "that we are in danger of forgetting its origin: the impulse to sculpture comes first of all from within, and the wholeness of the work derives from the wholeness of the body."

Considering all that has happened to sculpture in recent years, this is no small ambition. In the absence of some sort of animating gesture, the abstract monolith risks becoming inert, an insufficiently articulated mass. This very problem beset *Kronos,* one of Tucker's pieces on view in "Working in Brooklyn: Sculpture," an exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum last fall. Like *The Gymnasts, Kronos* was an abstract figure, but one at rest. Tall, kneaded and dug in its mass and on its surface, it didn't quite read as it should have. You could see the figure idea in it, and it even had a certain presence, but this was outweighed by our reading of it as a mound of plaster awaiting the sculptor's hand.

The Gymnasts succeeds to a far greater degree. The three sculptures in the group are commanding, authoritative presences that play off one another effectively. One of them is less easy to read, as a direct analogue of a figure in motion, than the others, yet it works as well as they do. In this work, the L-form is inverted, resting on what would normally be the topmost portion of the vertical element. "Supporting" this weight, it seems to bend in response, sending the free member out at a sharp, downward angle. In all three sculptures, Tucker has attained an unusual reconciliation: endowing the monolith with an uninhibited gestural freedom. Inevitably, of course, Tucker's new work calls up comparisons with Joel Shapiro's,

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even though the two sculptors pursue opposite ends. Tucker, the more traditional of the two, is concerned with claiming and holding a space through sheer presence, whereas Shapiro's more intimate work uses its scale to alter the viewer's perception of his objects and their ambient space.

I don't think *The Gymnasts* is necessarily Tucker's best sculpture. With the gestural reflex, he seems to have brought in a distinctive, recognizable subject to make them "carry," and he has paid a certain price for it. It makes the work overly ingratiating, a shade too "easy." Yet these new pieces work, finally, because Tucker is able to divert our attention from simple allusions to physical activity toward something deeper. Over time, one finds oneself drawn from the trio to a single sculpture, with its gouged and pitted surfaces and bending parts. In the concluding sentence of *Early Modern Sculpture,* Tucker says of Degas, "As for [his] notorious aversion to emotion, there is more pathos, more heroism, even, in his use of the human figure to express, through its own stressed posture, the 'grimace of the body,' an enduring and poised resistance to gravity, than in all the histrionics of Romantic art, Rodin included." Extended viewing of *The Gymnasts,* of the interaction of an incessantly activated surface and the articulation of masses, an articulation keyed to the nature of those masses—deliberate, weighty—conveys a distinct note of pathos, one in marked opposition to the initial impression of controlled abandon. We leave the gallery struck by their poignant evocation of physical and spiritual abrasion.

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Books

Tchaikovsky's ballets

by Eva Resnikova

Roland John Wiley's *Tchaikovsky's Ballets*[1] is an anomaly: an authoritative, important, useful book on dance, based on primary source materials, meticulously researched, and intelligently presented. It is all the more impressive an achievement considering that the author's field is musicology. As its title indicates, the book is meant primarily as a study of the three works Tchaikovsky wrote for the ballet—*Swan Lake* (both the original Moscow and posthumous St. Petersburg productions), *The Sleeping Beauty,* and *Nutcracker*—from their commissioning through the first performances. But more than that, it is an examination of a seminal period in the history of the classical dance, a period of transition that saw the demise of the Romantic era and the emergence of a new age of classicism which would restore to the ballet its prestige and reveal its artistic possibilities.

In many ways Wiley's book is a revisionist history. The traditional view, especially prevalent among musicians, holds that ballet music prior to Tchaikovsky was feeble because of the tyranny of the ballet master. John Warrack, for example, in *Tchaikovsky Ballet Music,* writes of composers such as Pugni and Minkus: "Not only was their talent negligible: it was required to be negligible. [Their scores] were expected to do no more than furnish unobtrusive aural décor and rhythmic support as a background against which the dancers could be put through their paces . . . . Few composers had the talent or the resolve to stand up to ballet masters whose interest was principally in the decorative." Mr. Wiley, on the other hand, recognizes the necessity in the nineteenth-century ballet for the authority of the ballet master over the composer; and rather than labeling as hacks those whose talents and temperaments suited them to compose under these conditions, he chooses to call the official ballet composers "specialists." Tchaikovsky was the first nonspecialist composer to, as it were, "cross over"—an event that was to have far-reaching consequences for the future not only of ballet music but of the very nature of the genre.

Tchaikovsky's innovation can be appreciated only against a background of the conventions of his time. Thus Mr. Wiley sensibly begins with an introduction, entitled "Some Traditions," in which he examines what qualities were then considered desirable in music composed specifically for the ballet. Contemporary sources are remarkably in accord, he notes, in citing melodiousness as the primary measure of what was called the *dansante* quality of music. Other requirements were clearly perceptible meters; regular phrases, generally in multiples of four; and, owing to the inherent physical limitations of the dancers, periodic

1 *Tchaikovsky's Ballets: Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty, Nutcracker,* by Roland John Wiley; Oxford University Press, 429 pages, $39.95.

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breaks in continuity. Mime scenes allowed the composer greater freedom in both rhythm and orchestration but were even more strictly subject to timing.

Beyond this, the composer had to acknowledge that purely musical interest which would be considered laudable in the concert hall could actually detract from choreography; that, in fact, an inverse relationship tended to exist between musical interest and dance interest. Indeed, *Swan Lake* received from one critic following the first production in 1877 the left-handed compliment of containing "so many purely musical virtues that the listener sitting in the theatre was drawn away in spite of himself by Mr. Tchaikovsky's music from what was happening on stage."[2]

Present-day readers may smile at the ingenuousness of such a statement; but it must be kept in mind that ballet at the time was above all else meant to be dramatic, and for this element to be overwhelmed or absent was considered a fatal flaw. So essential was drama in ballet that *Nutcracker* was criticized as not being a ballet at all: "Ballet, as a basic genre of art, is mimed drama and consequently must contain all the elements of normal drama . . . . There is nothing of this in *Nutcracker*. There is not even a subject." *The Sleeping Beauty* was considered by one critic to be an insult to the intelligence of the audience: "If, indeed, the ballet will be *only spectacle,* then no magnificence of production will redeem its emptiness, lack of content, and that tedium which, toward the end, inevitably possesses every 'grown-up,' not to mention an aesthetically developed audience." *The Sleeping Beauty* was criticized also because its dances were not felt to be dramatically motivated. One of the conditions of ballet, a critic wrote, was that the dances be "*a direct consequence* of the programme-libretto," whereas in *The Sleeping Beauty* "the course of the action is not at all *illustrated* by the dances, which are dragged in for no reason at all."

As is often the case, these comments tell us more about the persons who wrote them than about the works themselves. The Imperial Russian balletomane critics had their roots in the Romantic ballet and were intensely conservative. In this they were no different from the long-lived Petipa himself, who had made his debut as a dancer in 1831, a year before Marie Taglioni's *Sylphide,* and had danced with Carlotta Grisi and Fanny Elssler. With his first major success as a choreographer, *The Daughter of the Pharaoh,* in 1862, Petipa established the late-Romantic formula of the *ballet à grand spectacle.* Sylphs and peris might be replaced by an ancient Egyptian mummy come to life or the ghost of an Indian temple dancer, but the essence remained the same, and particularly the dramatic tension that imbued all the dancing with emotional implications. This was an approach especially suited to the talents of the Russian dancers of the time, who were long on temperament ("Russian soul") and rather short on technique.

The changes that were to lead to the production of *The Sleeping Beauty* in 1890 were instigated not by the ballet master but by a new Director of Imperial Theatres. Ivan Vsevolozhsky, a cultured francophile, was appointed in 1883 by Alexander III and charged with the task of reforming the ballet, which had been degenerating steadily despite the continuing enthusiasm of a small group of hardcore balletomanes—a point Mr. Wiley neglects to make in his otherwise informative analysis of the ballet audience. Prince Peter Lieven, in *The Birth of Ballets-Russes,* put it succinctly: "Although the balletomanes were rather mocked at and ridiculed, they still persisted in their loyalty to the art." On ballet days at the Maryinsky, "the half-empty auditorium contained a special public—a mixture of children accompanied by their mothers or governesses, and old gentlemen with binoculars." Alexandre Benois, in *Reminiscences of the Russian Ballet,* similarly notes that the balletomanes "were looked upon as somewhat eccentric and slightly depraved," and the ballet itself

2 Quoted in Wiley. All critics' quotations not otherwise attributed are quoted in Wiley.

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"was considered unworthy of the attention of serious people."

Vsevolozhsky set about instituting reforms with the intent of reviving the artistry and prestige of the ballet in St. Petersburg. His two most significant actions in this direction were to repeal the state monopoly on commercial theatre, which led to the presence in St. Petersburg of Italian virtuoso ballerinas beginning with Virginia Zucchi in 1885; and, having abolished the position of official ballet composer, to commission from Tchaikovsky toward the end of 1886 a ballet.

But Vsevolozhsky's influence extended even further, for it was he who was responsible for selecting the subject of this new ballet. It was not at first *The Sleeping Beauty* he suggested but La Motte Fouqué's *Undine,* that typically early-Romantic story, which had already been made into a ballet at least twice, by Paul Taglioni in 1836 and Jules Perrot in 1843. Nor was it new to Tchaikovsky: he had composed an opera on the subject in 1869, which he subsequently destroyed. (A fragment from one of its love duets found its way into the second act of *Swan Lake.*)

For Wiley, the question of why Tchaikovsky eventually rejected *Undine* has never been satisfactorily answered. But it seems clear that the composer was seeking to produce in his second ballet something completely new and fresh, and the old-fashioned Romantic story of Undine and Huldbrand was unsuited to inspire or support it. While struggling with *Undine* Tchaikovsky had written to Vsevolozhsky: "This is not simply a matter of confecting some kind of ordinary ballet music; I have an amibiton to write a *chef-d'oeuvre* in this genre." Vsevolozhsky, evidently sensing the source of Tchaikovsky's difficulties, then proposed a very different sort of story: *La Belle au bois dormant,* based on Perrault's fairy tale. This time the composer was "charmed, delighted beyond all description. It suits me perfectly," he wrote.

The Sleeping Beauty presented Tchaikovsky with a program that differed significantly from the usual ballet of the time in an essential respect: it was singularly free of dramatic tension. That this was a quality he found attractive may be inferred from his taste in ballerinas. According to his friend Nikolai Kashkin, Tchaikovsky "could not abide" the immensely popular Zucchi, "whose fame was based on the expressiveness of her mime"; rather, he admired technically accomplished but emotionally restrained dancers like Carlotta Brianza, who was to create the role of Aurora.[3] The critic Pleshcheyev reported that Tchaikovsky praised Brianza's performance in *The Sleeping Beauty* by claiming it "yielded nothing to the finest watch mechanism."

The Sleeping Beauty held another attraction for Tchaikovsky. Because the first act is meant to take place during the reign of Louis XIV, the courtly dances of the *fête champêtre* of the second act, one hundred years later, presented the composer with an opportunity to express his predilection for the music of the classical period, and especially of Mozart. A year earlier, about the time he was abandoning *Undine,* Tchaikovsky had composed *Mozartiana,* which was intended as both homage to and propaganda in behalf of the then-neglected classical master. Vsevolozhsky's proposal could not have come at a better time.

Though Tchaikovsky's music for *The Sleeping Beauty* obviously differs greatly from that of the specialist composers in the quality of its art, the first act, at least, does not in any way break radically with tradition. The music for the ballerina, especially, stays well within the conventions of the time: Aurora's Act I variation is accompanied by solo violin; the Rose Adagio, by legato strings and harp glissandos. In the first instance, it should be noted, the composer was constrained by Petipa's request for specific instrumentation.

But in the third act Tchaikovsky introduced an extraordinary effect, here heard for

3 Quoted in Vera Krasovskaya, "Marius Petipa and *The Sleeping Beauty,*" *Dance Perspectives* 49 (Spring 1972), p. 32.

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the first time in a ballet orchestra: the piano. It may be difficult today, when a ballet studio conjures up images of a tinkling upright, and the "piano ballet" has become a cliché, to appreciate what an innovation this was. But in fact the instrument of choice for dancing up to the first years of the twentieth century was the violin. For classes ballet masters either played the violin themselves or employed an accompanist. Rehearsals were conducted to a two-violin reduction of the score called a répétiteur. If a piano reduction was made, it was for publication, aimed at the home market in this era before sound recording and reproduction.

That the violin was inextricably linked to the Romantic ballet was related to the position of supreme authority enjoyed by the ballerina. The legato quality of bowed strings reflected the Romantic conception of grace as embodied by the *danseuse,* who often portrayed creatures whose domain was the air or the sea. The supported adagio, in which she displayed her grace to its fullest, was a response to the introduction of pointe work around 1830. And the single-line voice of the violin reflected the relatively simple nature of ballet music of the time, as well as the ballerina's status as the cynosure of choreographic interest: the first violin of the répétiteur represented the ballerina; the second, the corps de ballet, which danced or posed around her to form a decorative frame.

The piano in *The Sleeping Beauty* is initially heard in the pas de quatre of jewels and precious metals, the first of the Act III wedding divertissements. It enters immediately in the introduction of the pas de quatre as an accompaniment to the principal melody played by strings. It returns in the Silver Fairy's variation, where this time it is assigned the principal melody, with bell accompaniment. The Sapphire Fairy's variation, cut before the first performance, also contains piano accompaniment, to the principal melody played by pizzicato violins. For the Silver Fairy, Petipa had written in his instructions to the composer: "On doit entendre sonner l'argent"—"The ringing of silver [coins] should be heard"; so in this context the choice of instrumentation might seem merely *Klangfarbe.* But the piano returns later in the act, this time in the adagio of the grand pas de deux, the choreographic high point of the third act, and of the entire ballet.

In his musical analysis of *The Sleeping Beauty,* Wiley recognizes the significance of the piano but finds it "odd" that the instrument is introduced so late in the work. This leads him to a speculative digression on the allegorical implications of the ballet and their significance for the composer.

Wiley sees "an almost Aesopean double meaning" in *The Sleeping Beauty.* On the surface it is "positive in its outlook," representing "an apostrophe to the reigning monarch, expressed through the analogy of Florestan/Louis XIV"—the conventional view. But the third act, he claims, raises the possibility of "a second level of interpretation." The replacement of the Act I fairies representing Aurora's future attributes by the Act III fairies representing her future prosperity, though logical, implies to him "the relegation of personal virtues to material values."

Since for Wiley the sonority of the piano has "non-ethereal, material connotations," it is significant for him—and acceptable—that the instrument first appears in the jewel pas de quatre. But the implications of replacing the harp glissandos of the Rose Adagio with piano glissandos in Aurora's third-act adagio he finds disturbing, and he suggests that this was Tchaikovsky's response to the "disparities between exterior and interior interpretation" of the libretto. The return of the piano in the apotheosis leads him to ask the rhetorical question: "After the over-loud final cadence dies away, do one's thoughts return to Aurora's majestic [third-act] adagio, does one hear in the valedictory accents of its epilogue a reminder of a better time?" Earlier he had noted connotations of "sadness and nostalgia" in the closing of the adagio and quoted a contemporary reviewer who complained of an unwonted "inclination toward melancholy" in the third act as a whole.

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There are several problems with such an interpretation. First, the society that came up with the Fabergé Easter egg did not seem to take such a sinister view of "material values." Second, Tchaikovsky's undeniable tendency toward melancholy amounted almost to a personal style; to assign conventional meanings to the notes of sadness in his music seems ill-advised. (As we will see, the Sugar Plum Fairy's variation in *Nutcracker* is permeated with this sense of melancholy.) But most of all, Wiley's account disappoints because it does not provide a musical explanation for a musical phenomenon.

The piano was a striking new voice in the ballet orchestra, which presented a stark contrast to the conventional legato strings of the Romantic ballet. But it also looked back to an age before Romanticism, to the eighteenth century. Its precedents were the harpsichord continuo of the opera ballets of Handel and his contemporaries, and it reflected the more percussive quality of eighteenth-century dance, with its focus on footwork and petite batterie. The piano thus presented Tchaikovsky with a means simultaneously of looking back to the last great classical period in music and of being thoroughly modern. Far from embodying crass materialism and making us look back with nostalgia to a "better time," the piano in the third act of *The Sleeping Beauty* can be seen as a glorification of the present as a new Age of Enlightenment.

It is the received wisdom that *Nutcracker* betrays a lower level of melodic invention than *The Sleeping Beauty*. Wiley attributes what he calls this "default of inspiration" to a possible expression of the composer's dissatisfaction with the libretto. But Tchaikovsky's de-emphasis of melody in *Nutcracker* could also be seen as a conscious choice, a further distancing of his music from the conventions of the Romantic ballet. For if there is less melodic interest in *Nutcracker*, there is a correspondingly greater emphasis on articulation, evident from the first notes of the overture (which Balanchine called Mozartean[4]), with their staccato dots and eighth and sixteenth rests, and brought to its furthest development yet in the ballerina's single variation, the Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy. Whereas in *The Sleeping Beauty* the piano glissandos in the adagio of the grand pas de deux were largely ornamental, in *Nutcracker* Tchaikovsky composed an entire solo to the articulated, percussive sound of the celesta.

In his instructions to the composer for the Sugar Plum Fairy, Petipa had requested thirty-two bars of staccato in 2/4, and there is no reason to believe he expected anything other than conventional pizzicato violins, to which he would compose a taqueté variation. (In this he was no doubt guided by a knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the ballerina who would dance the role, Antonietta Dell'Era, a technically precise terre-à-terre dancer.) Tchaikovsky had been searching for a way to depict musically the dream world of Confiturembourg, and in Paris he discovered the recently invented celesta, a keyboard instrument with a bell-like sound. That it was not only the timbre that attracted him, however, is attested by the fact that the score allows for the substitution of a piano.

More than just the percussive nature of the Sugar Plum Fairy's music distinguishes it from conventional accompaniments for the ballerina. Extraordinarily, her dance is in a minor key. Benois is one of the few to point out that this pas de deux is "not ordinary ballet music." He goes so far as to claim a "tragic character" for the Sugar Plum Fairy's dance and notes that *Nutcracker* was composed only a year before the *Pathétique* Symphony, which, like the pas de deux, is "permeated with a sense of approaching death, alternating with moments full of a passionate thirst for life." To accept this interpretation is not necessarily to assume that Tchaikovsky had advance knowledge of his impending death; it is enough to know that

4 *Balanchine's Tchaikovsky: Interviews with George Balanchine,* by Solomon Volkov (Simon & Schuster, 1985), p. 179.

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his correspondence of this period indicates that the fifty-year-old composer had begun to think of himself as a deteriorating old man. Rather than tragic, though, the Sugar Plum Fairy's music seems bittersweet—a skillful response by the composer in avoiding what could easily have ended up as saccharine.

The vehemence of the critical response to *Nutcracker* from the balletomanes went beyond a mere reaction to the ballet itself. As Yuri Slonimsky points out, "Never before had the press devoted so much attention to a ballet production and especially to its music. Never before had it . . . theorized about the roads of development of the ballet theatre and its music." Tchaikovsky's score, he continues, and therefore the entire production, sounded like "a challenge to the prejudices and whims of the habitués of the ballet of the Imperial Theatres."[5] It did not help matters that a suite from the ballet had enjoyed a tremendous success at a concert given nine months earlier by the Russian Music Society—something that would have been unimaginable with the music of the specialist composers. Ballet music that could stand on its own with a discerning concert public clearly presented a threat to the art of ballet as the balletomanes had known it.

In such an art, a talent like Petipa's was not entirely appropriate; and, in fact, he dropped out of *Nutcracker* before the actual choreographing began, which was subsequently entrusted to Lev Ivanov, his longtime assistant ballet master. Petipa claimed illness, but Balanchine's suggestion to Volkov, that he might have "suddenly got scared," seems likely. It was not that, as is often claimed, Petipa was musically ignorant. According to Slonimsky,[6] he had studied music theory in Paris with the famous pedagogue Fétis and had had several years of violin. Ivanov, however, was renowned for his pianistic abilities, which points to an essential difference between his and Petipa's musicality: Petipa thought in terms of single-line melody, as on a violin, whereas Ivanov was able to hear music polyphonically, as on a piano. Petipa recognized the superiority of Tchaikovsky's music but seems to have preferred choreographing the conventional music of the specialist composers, which could easily be reduced to the two voices of the répétiteur, melody and accompaniment.

A répétiteur was prepared for *The Sleeping Beauty*; in fact, Tchaikovsky, apparently anticipating difficulties, took upon himself the responsibility of preparing it. In the end, he did not do so, and, indeed, as Wiley points out, corrections entered in the score indicate that the anonymous musician to whom this task was entrusted had problems in places determining the principal melody. In any event, it was not always used: Pleshcheyev reports Brianza recollecting that "rehearsals took place to piano accompaniment, played by Drigo [the conductor] himself." Lieven recounts that Glazunov, the only other nonspecialist composer of the Imperial period to write for the ballet, protested when he found Petipa rehearsing *Raymonda* to violin, claiming this distorted the music, and Petipa replied that "he could not help it because he could not pick out music played on the piano." That Petipa had difficulties with the music of Tchaikovsky and Glazunov is confirmed by Alexander Shirayev, an assistant ballet master, not only because of the inherently greater difficulty of their music but because he was hesitant to request of them the sorts of changes he would normally demand of a Minkus or a Pugni.

If Tchaikovsky's reputation as a composer has fluctuated according to the dictates of musical fashion, the quality of his ballet music has never been in question. Few, however, have recognized the extent of its innovation. The 1877 *Swan Lake* was the last

5 Yuri Slonimsky, *P. I. Tchaikovsky and the Ballet Theatre of His Time* (Moscow, 1956), quoted in "Writings on Lev Ivanov," translated and edited by Anatole Chujoy, *Dance Perspectives* (Spring 1959), pp. 45-6.

6 Yuri Slonimsky, "Marius Petipa," translated by Anatole Chujoy, *Dance Index* (May-June 1947), pp. 130-1.

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avatar of the Romantic ballet. In *The Sleeping Beauty,* Tchaikovsky produced both a metaphor for and the fulfillment of the new classical ballet, exploiting the time lapse of the story to introduce into its second half qualities that recalled the previous age of classicism in music yet were strikingly modern. In *Nutcracker* he incorporated these qualities into his music without recourse to programmatic implications.

Tchaikovsky's Ballets, by presenting a more complete picture than had heretofore been available, inevitably forces us to reassess our views. In the triumvirate of librettist, ballet master, and composer, the balance seems to shift: Vsevolozhsky as instigator deserves new appreciation; the prominent role traditionally assigned Petipa must be called into question, without in any way denigrating his actual contribution; and Tchaikovsky must be recognized as the virtual creator of the classical ballet.

Seeing Lawrence whole

Anthony Burgess Flame Into Being: The Life and Work of D. H. Lawrence. Arbor House, 278 pages, $15

reviewed by Robert Langbaum

"D. H. Lawrence died in March 1930, when I was just thirteen years old and too unliterary to notice," writes Anthony Burgess in *Flame Into Being: The Life and Work of D. H. Lawrence.* My father, he continues, "would undoubtedly have seen a brief notice of Lawrence's death in the *Daily Mail,* knowing him vaguely, like the newspaper itself, as a purveyor of dirt. 'Good riddance to bad rubbish,' he might have said in something like Lawrence's own boyhood accent."

As prolific a writer of novels and other genres as Lawrence, Burgess wrote this brief book to pay tribute to Lawrence on the occasion in 1985 of his centennial. While denying any influence of Lawrence on his own work, Burgess identifies himself with Lawrence in that they both came of working-class backgrounds and wound up as British writers in exile married to foreign aristocrats. Both as boys were called "mardarse" (sissy). This identification with Lawrence is intended to be a main theme, but doesn't prove very illuminating.

Using his own recollections, Burgess does, however, in his first chapter, "Lawrence and Myself When Young," give us a vivid sense of Lawrence's reputation in the Thirties. "Between his death and the outbreak of the Second World War, Lawrence was remembered as a doubtful prophet but almost totally ignored as a writer." In 1928 he had published a dirty book, which was banned, and had had the London exhibition of his dirty paintings raided by the police. The only book by Lawrence that anybody wanted to read in the Thirties was this dirty book, his last novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (published in Florence), which they could not easily get hold of. A Laurentian like Aldous Huxley was more widely read than "the master himself" (this was still true, as I recall, in the Forties). The rediscovery of Lawrence—with the outpouring of books on him, culminating in the ongoing Cambridge edition of his works and letters—is a postwar phenomenon.

Burgess's criticism of Lawrence, partly because his critical discussions are brief, is mediocre compared to the sophisticated criticism in half a dozen books I could name. What Burgess has to offer is a practical wisdom about life and art that we can only get when one successful artist writes about another. Here, as an example of his life wisdom, is a shrewd comparison between Lawrence's happy though turbulent marriage with the aristocratic Frieda von Richthofen and the miserable marriage of his parents, who were divided, according to the Lawrence legend, by class difference—the father a dark, sensual, drink-loving, soot-covered miner; the mother blue-eyed, bourgeois, puritanical.

> The father has come home, jovial and tipsily affectionate, but the mother rails like a harpy. It is a common sordid situation, as old as

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> Noah's vineyard, but David Herbert has made it elemental and mythical . . . life itself is the raging dialectic of man and woman. Lawrence's own married life was full of screaming and plate smashing. Marital dissension may have scared him as a child, but men had to fight women before taking them to bed.

Actually, as Lawrence's biographer Harry T. Moore shows in *Priest of Love,* Lawrence's father was no less petit bourgeois by birth (his father was a colliery tailor) than his mother; in fact their families were related by marriage. But the class difference figured glaringly in Lawrence's psyche, because the father was soot-covered and spoke dialect while the mother was clean and spoke standard English. What about the class difference between Lawrence and Frieda? Burgess, judging from his own experience, says that aristocrats, especially foreign ones, are better attuned to the working-class mentality than are the bourgeoisie—a statement that applies, whatever its general truth, to a radical bohemian aristocrat like Frieda.

Burgess makes a connection that has been made before, when he says that for the boy his father's daily descent into the mine became

> subterranean myth. He entered the earth, like the Sicilian snake in the poem yet to be written, and became a kind of Pluto . . . . If the unconscious plays so large a part in Lawrence's work, it may be because, in his youth, it had a physical counterpart in the coal mines.

The innovative leap is the connection between the father and the big black snake which, in the poem "Snake," repels the speaker when like a phallus the snake "put his head into that dreadful hole." Yet the snake is "like a god," "one of the lords of life." The father becomes a phallus, then a god, thus repeating the evolution of religion. Burgess writes well on Lawrence's life, because he understands that Lawrence's life becomes mythologized as it passes into his art.

It is because Burgess, with his life wisdom, understands Lawrence that he can write perceptively about the characters in Lawrence's novels. Suddenly "they behave oddly, their impulses overcome their reason, they are naked not clothed, their voices speak from the unconscious. We recognize that they are behaving as gods and goddesses behave." So Lawrence, I would add, was difficult to live with because his unconscious lay too near the surface; he gave expression to contradictory, destructive impulses that most of us suppress for the sake of consistency. Yet despite his violent changes of mood, Lawrence was, as Burgess says several times, lovable because of his spontaneity and vitality. Frieda wrote in her memoir: "Sometimes I hated him and held him off as if he were the devil himself. At other times I took him as you take the weather. Here's a spring day, glorious sunshine, what a joy!"

In his criticism Burgess does best with Lawrence's first successful novel, *Sons and Lovers* (1913), which he rightly considers a masterpiece second only to *Women in Love* (1920). To show the innovations in *Sons and Lovers,* Burgess quotes the right passages but his analyses are usually inadequate. He does, however, single out and say the illuminating thing about the scene in the novel which points toward the mythologizing technique of *Women in Love.* This is the scene in which all that has been repressed comes to the surface. In order to rival Paul's girl friend Miriam, Mrs. Morel embraces him murmuring, "'I've never had a husband—not really.'" Paul "stroked his mother's hair, and his mouth was on her throat." They are kissing passionately when Morel stumbles in drunk, and pronounces "venomously" words beyond his understanding that re-enact the myth: "'At your mischief again?'" "Oedipus," Burgess comments, "has taken possession." Father and son engage in a fistfight until the mother faints. Burgess ought to have described the rest of the scene, in which Paul, after his father has stumbled off to bed, cries, "'Don't sleep with him, mother,'" and she replies, "'I'll sleep in my

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own bed,'" with him. Lawrence always aborts the myth in order to maintain the realistic situation.

Burgess says wisely that *Sons and Lovers* could not have been written after Freud became well known. Lawrence apparently did not know Freud when writing the first draft, but learned about him from Frieda (who had read Freud in German and admired him) when writing the final draft after their elopement to the Continent. The case shows that the psychological novel reached its peak a little before and just as Freud became generally known. It has been overpowered since then by the Freudian vocabulary.

Burgess seriously underrates *The Rainbow* (1915), the novel to which *Women in Love* is the sequel (they were originally conceived as one novel), because his understanding of the novel is superficial. He can, for example, quote the following description of lovemaking between Ursula and the Polish army engineer Skrebensky without saying a word about its mythologizing way of depicting unconscious action:

> But hard and fierce she had fastened upon him, cold as the moon and burning as a fierce salt. Till gradually his warm, soft iron yielded, and she was there fierce, corrosive, seething with his destruction . . . . She had triumphed: he was not any more.

All Burgess has to say is: "Ursula's love life in the sequel is to find its fulfillment in Birkin, who is Lawrence himself. She is thus reserved for better things than an amorous Pole." He misses the point that Ursula, with her female self-sufficiency and destructiveness, is as much to blame for the failure of their relationship as is Skrebensky with his engineer's rigidity, that their mutually destructive relationship is like that of Gerald and Gudrun in the sequel, and that the Ursula of *The Rainbow* must evolve into the Ursula of *Women in Love. The Rainbow* was the first of Lawrence's novels to be banned, even though the novel celebrates marriage as the base of civilization. The rainbow symbolizes the arch uniting husband and wife; it is a covenant for the future, for marriage is the means through which our species evolves.

Burgess rightly considers *Women in Love* "one of the ten great novels of the twentieth century," but his criticism is not penetrating enough to show why the novel is so great. He quotes, for example, the description of Gudrun's first sight of Gerald—

> There was something northern about him that magnetized her. In his clear northern flesh and his fair hair was a glisten like sunshine reflected through crystals of ice. And he looked so new, unbroached, pure as an arctic thing,

—without realizing that Gudrun is seeing through to Gerald's archetype and to his Norse god-like death, which takes place on a symbolic arctic landscape in the Alps—a spectacular scene to which Burgess pays scant attention. He seems impervious to the symbolizing, mythologizing *imagery* which gives *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* their distinction, even though he usually perceives the mythologizing of character.

On characterization Burgess remains perceptive. "We have a strange impression," he says of the characters in *Women in Love,* "that everybody is suddenly stripped naked . . . . And it is this stripping down that is the essence of the book." The characters' "unconscious minds are . . . a little too close to the light . . . . we are in the age of the depth psychologist."

Burgess is good on the conflict between love and power in Lawrence's Australian novel *Kangaroo* (1923), which he considers underrated. *The Plumed Serpent* (1926), Lawrence's Mexican novel about the revival of Aztec religion, he dismisses as humorless without noticing its imaginative boldness and the remarkable coherence of its imagery.

Especially disappointing to me is Burgess's dismissal of *Lady Chatterley's Lover,* which in my opinion ranks among Lawrence's four masterpieces, even if a step lower than *Sons and Lovers, The Rainbow,* and *Women in Love.* He devotes too much space in so short a discussion to scolding Lawrence for trying to legitimize the Anglo-Saxon verb *fuck,*

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which was taboo, he argues, even for the Anglo-Saxons and is not applicable to a couple who love each other. Yeats was more sensitive to Lawrence's intention when he wrote that the gamekeeper's "coarse language . . . , accepted by both, becomes a forlorn poetry."

In dealing with Lawrence's biography, however, Burgess employs his novelistic talent to bring characters and scenes to life. Frieda comes through as a humorous, critical presence always ready to puncture Lawrence's solemnities. She suggested that he add to what was then *Sons and Lovers'* title, *Paul Morel,* the subtitle, "or, His Mother's Darling." There is an unforgettable vignette of their early housekeeping. "Frieda did nothing except be herself . . . a beautiful pagan." She watched while the puritanical pagan Lawrence, trained by his mother to hate dirt, scrubbed the floor. "'Lord, to see the dark floor flushing crimson,'" he wrote to Lady Cynthia Asquith, "'the dawn of deep red bricks rise from out this night of filth, was enough to make one burst forth into hymns and psalms.'" Lawrence went on for the rest of their marriage doing the scrubbing and cooking.

A recurrent theme is Lawrence's desire beginning in boyhood "for taking charge of things. Bert Lawrence led childhood excursions into the countryside . . . took charge of Christmas games and was the creative bullying force in charades." This will to power grew more intense with age. In 1915 Lawrence conceived the idea of organizing Rananim, a utopian colony of congenial friends of which he would be the leader. "It would be," Burgess comments, "Lawrence having his own way more successfully than seemed possible with fiery Frieda."

There were two main causes for argument between Lawrence and Frieda. Lawrence resented Frieda's inconsolable grief for the children she had abandoned in marrying him. Lawrence wanted to play the dominant husband, and Frieda refused to be subdued. Burgess argues convincingly that Lawrence is fighting out, in the novels starting with *The Rainbow,* his struggle for power over Frieda. Burgess does not mention Birkin/Lawrence's famous statement in *Women in Love* about "star equilibrium," the equilibrium of power between a man and a woman in a good marriage. But on the whole Lawrence (perhaps remembering his defeated father) stood for male dominance, especially in modes of sexual intercourse (he was against women taking their own independent pleasure from clitoral stimulation). Only with dominance, he felt, could a man give a woman what she fundamentally wanted and so transform her restlessness into contentment.

This view receives its most extreme expression in *The Plumed Serpent,* where the aristocratic Irish heroine is irresistibly attracted to her Indian, Aztec-revivalist husband Cipriano. Kate decides in the end, after having been tempted to return to Europe to salvage her ego, that she will be happier in sexual submission to Cipriano than in the sterile cultivation of her own self-enclosed, self-aggrandizing ego—a kind of ego Lawrence condemns also in men. It was significantly—and we see here how adroitly Burgess moves between the life and the work—while Lawrence was writing *The Plumed Serpent* in Mexico that "the contest of wills [between him and Frieda] came to its climax." Frieda decided she had had enough of Mexico, and prepared to visit Europe; Lawrence refused to accompany her. "It was on the quay with the liner hooting that they had a quarrel so violent that Frieda believed this was the end of their marriage." Lawrence tried to survive alone, but eventually joined her in England. Lawrence may have won in the novel, says Burgess, but in real life Frieda won.

In my opinion this may explain why in Lawrence's next and last novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover,* originally called *Tenderness,* the power struggle is finally eliminated from the right kind of love. Burgess sees the power struggle still there in the male dominated sexual intercourse. He forgets that there is a *progression* of intercourses by which Mellors and Connie arrive at more reciprocal modes

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of intercourse; so that in the end Mellors, with Connie pregnant and the two of them separated awaiting their divorces before marrying, can write to her, "'It's my Pentecost, the forked flame between me and you.'" The Christian virtues have been reconstituted in a new way. So much for this "dirty" book.

Best of all is the penultimate chapter on Lawrence's death of tuberculosis in Vence in southern France (the chapter title, "Death in Vence," is too cute). A skillful novelist, Burgess switches to point of view, letting the story be told by Aldous and Maria Huxley, who took over in the end from the incompetent Frieda, and by the poet Robert Nichols, who lived nearby. Lawrence had fragile lungs since boyhood, but always passed off his symptoms as a mere cough. Even after he first spat blood in Taos, New Mexico, in 1924, he refused to take precautions but lived in climates and did strenuous things that were bad for him. Huxley, who was sure Lawrence could have been cured were it not for his "'strange obstinacy against professional medicine,'" could not forgive Frieda for not making him take precautions: "'Frieda is worse than he is. We've told her that she's a fool and a criminal; but it has no more effect than telling an elephant.'" According to Nichols, Huxley heard Lawrence say a day or two before he died, "'Frieda, you have killed me.'"

Lawrence didn't believe in doctors, because he believed that all illness is psychosomatic. "'What is the matter with us,'" he wrote in a letter, "'is primarily chagrin. Then the microbes pounce.'" As for Frieda, I would say in her defense that she shared Lawrence's philosophy and respected his right to live by it. Neither believed it worthwhile to diminish one's flame of being by a single degree in order to stretch out one's days. After his pain had been eased by morphia, Lawrence died peacefully on March 2, 1930, at the age of forty-four, with "the comforting grip of Frieda on his ankle." "'It felt so full of life,'" she herself wrote, "'all my days I shall hold his ankle in my hand.'"

Frieda remained faithful in her fashion. She returned to live on their ranch in Taos, to which in 1935 she had Lawrence's ashes transported (not, as Burgess says, his body). Tourists find on the ranch, behind the house, a little white memorial chapel for Lawrence—built by Frieda and her companion Angelo Ravagli (later her husband)—with conspicuously in front of it Frieda's tombstone. Burgess is sarcastic about the tourists; but he shouldn't be, because Lawrence's life has become as much a legend, as much a work of art, as his works and competes in interest with them. Burgess ends by saying that Lawrence is one of those writers (Byron and Wilde, I would add, are others) who must be taken whole, the life and all the works together. Their stature derives more from such wholeness than, as with a writer like Joyce, from the perfection of single works. Burgess, with his ability to pass from the life to the work and back again, is good at helping us to take Lawrence whole, even if he is not so good at making us see the value of Lawrence's single works.

Two reputations

Timothy Materer, editor Pound/Lewis: The Letters of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis. New Directions, 384 pages, $37.50

reviewed by Victor M. Cassidy

In 1948, Wyndham Lewis published brief reminiscences of two longtime colleagues: Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot. It was in 1915, Lewis wrote, that Pound first introduced him to Eliot. Pound was then at the height of his powers, producing beautiful poetry and vigorous essays in which he argued for hardness and clarity in literature. Lewis, England's leading modern artist, was completing his first novel. Eliot, a pleasant and rather handsome graduate student visiting London between terms, had published some promising verse.

Lewis went on to tell how much the personal fortunes of his friends had changed in

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the ensuing thirty-three years. Pound was now "confined in a criminal asylum in America" while Eliot was "a rarely honoured member of his profession, dwelling in the bland atmosphere of general approbation." Lewis might have added that he found his own position unsatisfactory.

Lewis was a man of sixty-six in 1948. For almost forty years he had practiced two professions side by side—artist and writer—producing roughly a thousand paintings and drawings and about thirty-five books. Despite all this, Lewis saw himself as a failure. He was known primarily in Britain. Few of his artworks had entered important collections; his books, even the best of them, were mostly out of print. Lewis's financial prospects were so bleak in 1948 that he was seeking a college teaching post in North America, even though such employment would take him, perhaps permanently, from his lifetime home in London.

Though Lewis's reputation and income were to improve before his death in 1957, he never achieved the reputation or material security that his gifts and hard work should presumably have earned for him. Today he is a rather sketchy figure in the public mind: people do not quite know who he was or what he believed.

In most ways, Pound did better than Lewis. By the time he reached middle age, he had an international reputation. The best writers of his generation—and of the one that preceded it, too—outspokenly admired his work and often sought his advice.

But Pound wanted to change the world, to reform culture and government, and few who respected his capabilities as an author were prepared to accept him as a literary dictator or social prophet. Frustrated and embittered by his failure to acquire the influence he sought, Pound relocated rather than change tactics. After spending the first half of his career in London and Paris—then the world's intellectual capitals—he withdrew to Rapallo, a small village in Italy.

While he still resided in London, Pound had become interested in Social Credit, a scheme of monetary and political reform that appeared to promise economic justice in a democratic society. As Pound isolated himself in Rapallo, his advocacy of Social Credit grew into a preoccupation and eventually was distorted into a monstrous obsession that wasted his energy, stole his reason, and ruined much of his work. During World War II, the Ezra Pound who had produced such exquisite poetry and translations made radio broadcasts from fascist Italy in which he denounced the Jews and attacked Allied political leaders. Imprisoned at war's end and charged with treason by the American government (he was a United States citizen), Pound was adjudged insane and never brought to trial. He was sent instead to St. Elizabeth's, a psychiatric hospital in Washington, D.C.

So what was it about Pound and Lewis that kept them from reaching their personal goals while Eliot acquired influence, honors, and wealth? *Pound/Lewis: The Letters of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis* provokes this question and provides some answers.

One thing is certain about the letters of Lewis and Pound; they were not written with posterity in mind. These are not literary letters but the hasty exchanges of two busy professionals about a passage in a manuscript or the price of a drawing. There is much talk of money, much less of personal matters, and virtually none of cultural questions.

Mutual respect and shared professional concerns formed the basis of the Pound-Lewis friendship. The two met in 1909 but were only casual acquaintances until 1913, when their interests converged and a collaboration began. Lewis was then a painter primarily, who wanted art to reflect the vibrant industrial environment of modern Europe. Into his energetic, semi-abstract work he incorporated the forms of skyscraper architecture. Figures, when they appeared, looked like machines. Also resolutely modern, Pound sought a poetic language that was as natural, concentrated, and expressive as possible. He called himself an Imagist.

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Pound and Lewis wished to propagandize for their ideas and to seize undisputed leadership of London's avant-garde. Together they published *BLAST,* a review of the arts, in July of 1914. Quarto-sized with bright puce covers and explosive typography, *BLAST* created a sensation. It contained manifestos and amusing lists of persons, some blasted and some blessed. One of the most striking contributions to *BLAST* was a play by Lewis called *Enemy of the Stars.* He created an experimental prose for this work that was as harsh and jagged as the forms in his paintings.

BLAST announced Vorticism, a new movement in the arts—London's response to Cubism, Futurism, and Expressionism. To Pound, Vorticism was the principle of Imagism applied to all the arts. Lewis, who never could come up with a satisfactory definition, declared late in life that "Vorticism, in fact, was what I, personally, did, and said, at a certain period."

Vorticism did not survive the war. Hostilities began soon after *BLAST* appeared, and the public lost interest in art. Within a year or so, most Vorticist artists—there never were more than a half dozen—entered the armed forces; one died there. A second number of *BLAST* appeared in 1915 but few cared.

It is during the Vorticist period that the Pound-Lewis correspondence begins. The liveliest letters date from 1916 through 1919, when Lewis served in the British Army and Pound, living in London, acted as the agent for his friend's writings and art. Along with work-related information, Lewis sent complaints about military life and vivid accounts of the front. "A horrible phonograph played by my horrible brothers-in-arms renders intelligible writing difficult," he exclaimed in 1917. "The unspeakable, vulgar brutes have introduced The End of a Perfect Day and a score more [of] obnoxious pieces into a dugout 12 feet by 8 . . . . They've just put on 'Sympathy'; may their next fart split up their backs and asphyxiate them with the odour of their souls!" At a later time, in describing a trip on foot through shellfire to an observation post, Lewis wrote, "You meet plenty of dead men. I stumbled into one (of two) with his head blown off so that his neck[,] level with the collar of his tunic, reminded you of sheep in butchers' shops, or a French Salon painting of a Moroccan headsman. He was a Scot, & had been killed a few hours before."

Pound's replies were business mostly, mixed with joking and ribaldry. The human being that emerges from these letters is utterly honest and apparently tireless in promoting Lewis's work. Whenever a sale was made and a sum came along, Pound forwarded it and provided a careful accounting. He handled money very well, never falling behind or allowing misunderstandings to develop. Pound's accounts of himself ("My present existence is that of a highly mechanized typing volcano") were always connected with the advancement of culture.

Pound's unselfishness in forwarding the careers of others once moved Ernest Hemingway to call him "a kind of saint." Pound saw the potential in Eliot, encouraged and schooled him at a key time, and edited *The Waste Land.* It was Pound who found Joyce an income so he could get on with *Ulysses.* And first books by Frost, Hemingway, and Lewis were pushed into print by Ezra Pound. His disinterested willingness to help anyone with talent won Pound numerous friends. It accounts for the intense loyalty that many showed toward him during the worst periods of his life.

Pound's helpful spirit, so often welcome, occasionally proved annoying. In 1920, the poet moved to Paris while Lewis remained in London. Somewhat out of touch with what his friend was doing, Pound proposed well-meaning schemes for promoting Lewis—a Lewis number of *Little Review,* an art exhibition in Milan—which were rejected with slowly mounting impatience. Lewis was absorbed in writing a comprehensive statement of his philosophy and did not want distractions. "Until I can produce something unassailable, & better than I have up to the present," he stated, "it is perhaps best to leave me alone . . . . Forget me for a

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year, say." As things turned out, the writing project took longer to finish than Lewis had anticipated. When his original manuscript grew beyond manageable size, he divided it into several books. The most important of these are *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), *The Lion and the Fox* (1927), and *Time and Western Man* (1927).

Pound withdrew for a while but returned again to prodding. Lewis eventually lost his temper. "Please note the following," he snapped, "because [in the past] we were associated to some extent in publicity campaigns, that does not give you a mandate to interfere when you think fit, with or without my consent, with my career." Even this, accompanied as it was by further antagonistic remarks, did not stop Pound for very long. He was often so single-minded in pursuit of his goals that he did not hear—or care to hear—what was being said to him.

This "deafness" of Pound's was a major cause of his failure to influence literary London. In an account of his first meetings with the poet, Lewis said that Pound in 1909 "was an uncomfortably tensed, nervously straining, jerky, reddish-brown young American . . . . The impression he made, socially, was not a good one . . . . The trouble was . . . that he had no wish to *mix*: he just wanted to *impress*." According to Lewis, Pound sought to prove "that he was superior to all other intellectuals in intellect, and all poets in prosodic prowess. *They* were to be the spectators merely—they were of very little account. The feelings of dislike were mutual and immediate . . . and he never sought to hide the fact that he looked upon them as of very little consequence."

Lewis concluded that Pound had a split personality. His better side was the sensitive poet, the man of quiet tastes and great kindness. The poet's weaknesses were his rigidity, his tactless arrogance, and his tendency to hector. In London, and later in Paris, Pound became a man of high reputation but little influence.

Lewis's personality was so different from Pound's that a reader of their correspondence often wonders how the two remained friends for so long. Pound was a born teacher, an academic *manqué,* rather a bookish sort of a man. Lewis, by contrast, had no patience with the classroom. In early adulthood, he spent some time in art school and then, for several restless years, shuttled between London and the Continent. During lengthy stays in Paris, he educated himself, absorbing the art of Picasso and Kandinsky and reading the Russian novelists, the French, and Nietzsche.

During his *Wanderjahre,* Lewis received funds from his mother. She supported him too long—well into his thirties—and he never learned how to handle money. He simply did as he pleased, without much thought for the consequences. As a result, he never found a way to earn a steady living from art and writing but stumbled instead from one financial crisis to the next. Exasperated by these interruptions in his work, Lewis bitterly resented his lack of independent means and the small rewards available to artists.

Constant financial chaos diminished Lewis's professional stature and damaged his work. On numerous occasions, in order to meet urgent money needs, he dealt in hasty and amateurish fashion with art collectors, editors, and publishers. He broke promises he had made or demanded unreasonable payment for work, failed to get it, and then, under crushing financial pressure, made humiliating compromises. The quality of his work suffered as projects were rushed to completion in order to raise cash.

But Lewis's worst flaw—the one that did him the most damage in the long run—was his tendency to confuse people with their ideas and to deal in personalities. When he thought he was offering legitimate criticism or being satirical, he was often perceived as malicious. In 1932, *Doom of Youth,* a volume of social commentary, and *Filibusters in Barbary,* a travel book, were withdrawn from the market after libel suits. Four years later, *The Roaring Queen,* a novel, was stopped by the publisher at the page-proof stage for fear of similar action. Such incidents earned Lewis a reputation among publishers as an

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author who brought trouble. Though he managed to get most of his books out, Lewis went from one publisher to another during the Thirties and found no one willing to sustain him over the long term.

Lewis's victims did not forget what he had written and found ways to get even. No evidence of organized conspiracy exists, but Lewis complained—and there is every reason to believe him—that enemies denied him many opportunities (anthology appearances, lectures, and the like) that would have brought his work before larger audiences and improved his income.

Meanwhile, Pound was undergoing a profound transformation. By 1936, his letters had changed ominously. Politics replaced culture as his leading concern and his language became increasingly strident. He invented punning names, some scabrously indecent, for the political figures he disliked. Now, instead of inviting Lewis to exhibit his art, he was counseling him to write fascistic tracts. Pound had begun to lose touch with reality.

Lewis ignored Pound's most foolish remarks and talked about work. But in those days, Lewis was a fascist too. He had written favorably about Hitler and had defended fascism in Italy and Spain. In 1937, he perceived his error and made a public recantation. Thereafter he was more cautious. In 1948, he was telling Pound: "do understand that I am politically a complete agnostic. No theory of the State interests me in the slightest . . . . If you would take my advice you would throw any books you possess dealing with economics out of the window." Though these words come from a draft letter that may never have been sent, they make Lewis's position clear.

Unlike Pound, Lewis did not allow fascism to spoil his work. During the period in which he wrote his political books, he had a well-received one-man art exhibition and published *Men Without Art* (1934), a major work of literary criticism, and *The Revenge for Love* (1937), the novel which is generally acknowledged to be his best. Lewis's social life continued as before; most of his friends were anti-fascists who refused to take his pronouncements seriously. Late in 1937, a group of young admirers honored Lewis with a special double number of *Twentieth Century Verse,* a literary magazine.

Pound and Lewis did not communicate during the war. Pound was in Italy and Lewis spent most of his time in Canada. He had travelled to New York in 1939 to paint portraits and lecture. When the war began he could not go home. Since he carried a British passport, Lewis had to move to Canada when his U.S. visitor's visa expired. He lived most of the time in extreme poverty in a dilapidated Toronto hotel.

Anyone who doubts that Pound belonged in an insane asylum should read the letters he sent Lewis after 1946. Lucid in fits and starts, Pound wrote mostly about the past in impenetrable language: "have yu heard from a s.o.b. who sez he has writ a bk/ in colab/ with Einstein (god damn him)*. and now proposes a work on woild lit/ from Adam to us? or at least Adam to Ez.? he hrites a vunny englisch vrom sVVizzerlandt. *Einstein, not the s.o.b. The s/o/b. seems to be documented up to about 1930." Lewis replied: "Your last letter undecipherable, just cannot imagine what lies beneath the words. Have you anything really to say?" Pound, unfortunately, had very little left to say.

Meanwhile, Lewis was enjoying a bit of a boom. He produced major books which were well received. The BBC broadcast adaptations of his fiction and the Tate Gallery staged a retrospective of his career. His personality had mellowed and he found it easier to live in a normal manner. Though blindness ended his career as a painter in 1951, he continued to write, producing fresh work almost to the day of his death.

When Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis lived, personal manias great and small diminished their achievement and reputations. Both men are gone now and the passage of time has given us a perspective from which to judge their work. It cannot be denied that there is much to admire in what they created.

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Lyric to narrative

Andrew Motion Dangerous Play: Poems 1974-1984. Penguin (London), 110 pages, £2.95

reviewed by Robert Richman

It is unfortunate that the poetry of Andrew Motion is not better known in the United States. Despite its occasional appearance in *The London Review of Books* and the *Times Literary Supplement,* his poetry remains one of England's best-kept secrets. Of his three previous books of poetry, only the first—*The Pleasure Steamers,* published in 1978—is currently available in the United States. (Carcanet, the estimable British publishers who started distributing their titles in America two years ago, have sensibly included this title on their backlist.) *Dangerous Play,* Motion's most recent book, seems headed for the same unlucky fate as its two predecessors, *Independence* (1981) and *Secret Narratives* (1983), both of which were published by the Salamander Press of Edinburgh but were never distributed here. The Penguin edition of *Dangerous Play,* which reprints the contents of the handsome hardcover edition brought out last year by Salamander, will attract new readers for Motion in Britain, but none here.

Motion is a central figure in the younger generation of British poets. Nonetheless, *Dangerous Play*—which brings together twenty-two old poems, seven new ones, and a previously uncollected prose memoir—would seem to be a rather premature "selected." After all, his poetic career is only ten years old. (He turned thirty-two when this book first appeared in 1984.) What's more, all of Motion's earlier books of poetry are still in print. But *Dangerous Play* is no vain indulgence. The new material, together with the earlier work, highlights Motion's shift over the last decade from lyrical to narrative poetry. This new direction is so much the *raison d'être* of this volume, and so deeply underscored throughout, that we are really being asked to read the older poems included here—poems we formerly admired for their lyric quality—in an altogether new light:

> Even though we know now
> your clothes will never
> be needed, we keep them,
> upstairs in a locked trunk.
>
> Sometimes I kneel there,
> holding them, trying to relive
> time you wore them, to remember
> the actual shape of arm and wrist.
>
> My hands push down between
> hollow, invisible sleeves,
> hesitate, then lift
> patterns of memory:
>
> a green holiday, a red christening,
> all your unfinished lives
> fading through dark summers,
> entering my head as dust.

When we first read this poem—called "In the Attic"—in *The Pleasure Steamers,* phrases like *patterns of memory, dark summers,* and *your unfinished lives* stood out as evidence of a fine lyric gift. But next to the recent work in *Dangerous Play*—particularly "Skating," the prose memoir—we see this poem as the monologue of a speaker whose words skirt some dreadful "secret narrative" of incapacity and death which has traumatized him but which remains hidden beneath the surface of the poem. What was formerly a "poetic" response to love and loss has been transformed into the jagged testimony of someone irrevocably touched—as in the other poems in *Dangerous Play*—by war, revolution, or random violence.

Motion's turn to the narrative mode is less a revolt against his early work than an extension of it. When he first emerged on the poetry scene, he was touted as the newest member of the "English line" of verse in the century. To be sure, the diction, cadence, and syntax of poets such as Edward Thomas and Philip Larkin were much in evidence in the poems of *The Pleasure Steamers.* Motion went on to publish, in 1980 and 1982

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respectively, critical books on both Thomas and Larkin. He has even taught at the University of Hull, where Larkin has spent many years as librarian. But the best evidence of Motion's lineage is found in his contribution to *Larkin at Sixty,* the *Festschrift* published by Faber & Faber in 1982. In this essay Motion recalled one of the signal events of his youth, when a teacher lent him *As It Was and World Without End,* the two-volume memoir by Helen Thomas, the poet's widow, and *The Less Deceived* by Philip Larkin.

And sure enough, the bleak view of life and of the world which is the single most important element in the poetry of Thomas and Larkin is shared by Motion. In the *Festschrift* essay Motion characterizes the attitude he admired as that of the "isolated onlooker." But this scarcely describes the curious temperament, common to all three poets, which sees all earthly evidence of hope and renewal—in images of rain, the dawn, and pastoral country scenes—as the grim signals of oncoming death, and which sees love as a cruel reminder of all the things which can never be shared. Motion's early poetry seemed to be the work of someone who—as Thomas often did—could inexplicably storm out of the house and disappear for hours or days, leaving his baffled wife and children worried that he would never return.

But there was always another side to the poetry of the "English line." This is its transcendent element. After his first, Yeats-inspired book, *The North Ship,* Philip Larkin claimed to relinquish what the Scotsman George Fraser called a poetry of "veeshion" for a poetry of "moarel deescourse." Nevertheless, transcendental impulses exist throughout Larkin's oeuvre. Seamus Heaney and Motion himself, among others, have demonstrated that the visionary impulse has played a role in Larkin's poetry even after he claimed to have abandoned it. The fact is, visionary elements persist throughout the poetry of the "English line." In his book on Larkin, Motion quotes a passage by the French Symbolist poet Mallarmé, one of the chief influences on the poetry of Yeats. Motion quotes the French poet with respect to Larkin's poetry, but the statement applies equally well to other members of the "English line," such as Thomas Hardy, A. E. Housman, Edward Thomas—and Andrew Motion:

> To name an object is to do away with three-quarters of the enjoyment of the poem which is derived from the satisfaction of guessing little by little: to suggest it, to evoke it—that is what charms the imagination.

If the "secret narratives" of Motion's personae never wander off into the realms of bodiless subjectivity that we associate with Symbolist poetry, they certainly do keep us "guessing little by little." Thus the narrative mode functions, for this the youngest member of the "English line," as a way of escaping the "moarel deescourse" normally found in the verse of that tradition.

"The Letter" is a poem full of what Motion elsewhere calls "fragrant darknesses" and it requires the reader's imaginative assistance in piecing together the hidden story:

> If I remember right, his first letter.
> Found where? My side-plate perhaps,
> or propped on our heavy brown tea-pot.
> One thing is clear—my brother leaning
> across asking *Who is he?* half angry
> as always that summer before enlistment.
>
> Then alone in the sunlit yard, mother
> unlocking a door to call *Up so early?*
> —waving her yellow duster goodbye
> in a small sinking cloud. The gate creaks
> shut and there in the lane I am running
> uphill, vanishing where the woodland
> starts.
>
> The Ashground. A solid contour swept
> through ripening wheat, and fringe
> of stippled green shading the furrow.
> Now I am hardly breathing, gripping
> the thin paper and reading *Write to me.*
> *Write to me please. I miss you. My angel.*

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Almost shocked, but repeating him line
by line, and watching the words jitter
under the pale spidery shadows of leaves.
How else did I leave the plane unheard
so long? But suddenly there it was—
a Messerschmitt low at the wood's edge.

What I see today is the window open,
the pilot's unguarded face somehow
closer than possible. Goggles pushed up,
a stripe of ginger moustache, and his eyes
fixed on my own while I stand
with the letter held out, my frock blowing,

before I am lost in cover again,
heading for home. He must have banked
at once, climbing steeply until his jump
and watching our simple village below—
the Downs swelling and flattening, speckled
with farms and bushy chalk-pits. By lunch

they found where he lay, the parachute
tight in its pack, and both hands spread
as if they could break the fall. I still
imagine him there exactly. His face pressed
close to the sweet-smelling grass. His legs
splayed wide in a candid unshamable V.

The poem is more a series of gaps and leaps than of details. And the details themselves, it is suggested, are unreliable: "If I remember right . . . ." But if the facts of this ghastly accident are partial or inaccurate, and if the love the accident has so brutally ended is hardly touched upon, the psychological portrait of the speaker is uncannily precise. "The Letter" is a war poem that does not take place on the battlefield, and the casualty of war that is its subject is not a soldier.

"The Letter" is dramatic monologue. It lets us see war through the eyes of another and therefore anew. In "Beginning the Move" (does the title refer to Motion's "move" to narrative poetry?), war is again filtered through the eyes of another person:

The day I began my move, they happened
to fly the wounded home. I would have been
hands on hips by the bookshelves wondering
Where do I start? as the first plane
crescendoed and wheeled away to the
country—
a VC 10 set for our toytown local base.
I soon forgot it—toing and froing
with armfuls of books, first, then clothes,
then jittery plates. But in mid-afternoon,
when I was almost done, and just dizzily
mooning down aisles of loaded tea-chests,
the plane returned out of nowhere, huge,

and filling my mind's eye once more.
I imagined it parked at Arrivals, engines off,
but still with their rippling trumpets of air,
and a door was gaping wide at the wing
where the soldiers appeared: on stretchers,
some hobbling, some with arms round friends

like drunks helped towards bed, and one—
why did he look Chinese?—emerging at last
in tears, with a pantomime sliding stagger.
Before he was off the steps he had vanished,
lost with the rest as a hectic crush
of families jostled me back to myself.

By then I was through to the kitchen,
and found I was slouched with my face leant
close to the goldfish tank, watching the fish
wriggle and flick in the cave of my silhouette,
and my mouth relaxing a comical kneading
pout
to ask aloud *How shall I ever move you?*

This naïve and self-absorbed speaker does not capture our sympathy. Yet observations like "arms round friends" and "one—why did he look Chinese?" so brilliantly fulfill Pound's injunction to make it (in this case, war) new, that our imagination certainly is captivated. But even more important is Motion's reclaiming of war and violence as subjects for poetry. He shows that it is possible to write about war without resorting to shocking imagery and melodramatic rhetoric.

Motion's suppression of details relevant to the poem may strike some American readers as a kind of willful literary posturing. After all, poets in the States are expected above all to *speak their minds.* The confessional poets are only the latest group

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devoted to this idea. But the "authenticity" that is the reward of this aesthetic approach has itself become problematical. Indeed, the poetry that grows out of this quest for authenticity is increasingly perceived to be as stylized, literary, and *in*authentic as the stiffest formal verse. But there are poets who feel that to parade one's grief is to cheapen it. Motion omits information precisely and paradoxically because he does not wish to degrade what has been omitted. Similarly, his personae, although imagined, are used for the purpose of penetrating to what is most real. As he writes in the final stanza of a new poem entitled "The Whole Truth:"

> And all of it lies, just as my pictures
> of you at your kitchen table were lies—
> one tender imaginary scene succeeding
> another, but only to prove what is true.

One tender imaginary scene succeeding another: Motion realizes that the poet tends to be gentler with the "lies" produced by his imagination, while "reality" and the "truth" often bring out his most fearful instincts. This is another reason to favor fictions and fictional personae.

Motion's abandonment of the lyric mode goes hand in hand with his preference for the "lies" of the imagination. The impulse that refuses to cheapen emotion by parading it also resists the inclination to poeticize it. The title of Motion's long poem, "Independence," refers not only to India's extrication from Britain's imperial grip but also to the poet's freedom from rhymes, end-stopped lines—indeed, from nearly every standard poetic effect:

> Courting all that spring
> to Independence—spring
> and into the heat: shimmering days
> I hurried to end for you.
>
> Each late afternoon
> we were side by side
> at your father's bungalow,
> longing for sunset, the punkah
> lightly weighing us down
> with its soft rush of air.

Later in this same poem, a recording by a musical group called The Inkspots strikes the poem's narrator as the expression of "a commonplace / tender grief." Motion's suggestion—that the writer who transcribes common grief is really just splattering his ink—extends to the poet. A similar metaphorical point is made when Motion's narrator observes the walls of the "sweltering room" in which the Christmas dance is being held. They are "dotted with cotton-wool glued there / by servants who had never seen snow."

But Motion's best covert gloss on the subject of his move from lyricism to narrative is in the poem entitled "West 23rd":

> Where the cab smashed it, ꓘ'IVAꓠ ꓠNOꓛ is my
> marker—
> West 23rd, and a block to Joey's apartment,
> the manholes
> spurting their usual sprays of steam. I stride
> them down,
> blind in each cloud, then myself, then blind
> again.
>
> And the first thing back I phone you, the quick
> trampolining
> bbbbrrring, bbbbrrring bouncing me
> thousands of miles to your desk,
> your bedside, wherever I catch you. *Only a fort-*
> *night now—*
> your speech is slow, as if filtered through
> water—*Come soon . . .*
>
> Joey thinks he is passing the time for me,
> asking me *Nightcap?*—
> wiping the kitchen table clean with his inside
> cuff
> and trickling two steady tracks of cocaine.
> *Me first?*
> *Or did I go first last night?* If he speaks at all
> after this
>
> what he says is the same: *I never fought, but I*
> *tell you,*
> *it fucked me up. I hid three years. I even tried*

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faking my death, and it must have worked. Those others,
who went, they're fucked up too, but more. Now I'm free
and I never killed anyone. Ask around. Not a single one.
I make my excuses early, and lie on my unmade bed
telling myself I might see you, or hear your voice
in the rain of luminous atoms streaking the air.

But you never appear. When the atoms subside at last
it is only for traffic—the hiss of its surf all night,
and Joey padding the corridor barefoot just before sleep,
some almost-forgotten instinct reminding him: bolt the door.

As in all of Motion's poems, the narrator is the real subject of "West 23rd." His confused state—"blind . . . then myself, then blind again"—reflects Motion's own choice of whether to go for broke, emotionally and lyrically, in his poetry (and thereby "kill" his subjects again, in public), or to remain "independent" of the urge to exploit his subjects by exposing them. The temptation offered by Joey—who faked his death—is to surrender to cheap revelation. But if Joey is a coke-snorting casualty of the aesthetic practice of faking death, the "others" who took the plunge for emotionalism—and by this Motion must mean the hard-core confessionalists—are even worse off than Joey, or so Joey says: *Those others, who went, they're fucked up too, but more. Now I'm free and I never killed anyone. Ask around.* We are apt to believe Joey. After all, he still has in him that "almost-forgotten instinct" to "bolt the door."

Motion's abrupt cut to an American setting (with a classic post-Sixties character) is perfect for the expression of this subject. For America is first and foremost the place where one is defined by one's experiences and where the uninhibited expression of those experiences is the primary means of confirming one's place in the world. *I never fought, but I tell you, it fucked me up,* says Joey, because to have been touched by some historical event—and this is doubtful—is his only available means of validation. So with that indigenous American product, confessional verse. It validates itself merely because it *reveals* something—even if the exposed catastrophe may not have affected the poet as much as he insists, or may not have happened at all. Indeed, so removed is this particular catastrophe from its speaker that its revelation can only be artificially induced.

But the parading of private grief isn't the only aspect of confessionalist poetry that Motion wishes to question. His work also challenges the instinct—still crippling readers on both sides of the Atlantic—to believe that the "I" of the poem belongs to the author. As Motion informs us in the very first poem in *Dangerous Play*:

. . . He was never
myself, this boy, but I know if I tell you his story
you'll think we are one and the same: both of us hiding
in fictions which say what we cannot admit to ourselves.

Motion asks us to see not only war anew (as "The Letter" and "Beginning the Move"), but poetry as well: as the words of others. This is so radical a break with the immediate past that Motion has every right to voice concern that "you'll think [he and his creation] are one and the same." That's the danger of this play.

So how, amid all these strictures against emotionalism and against standard poetic effects, does Motion manage to write poetry? The answer involves his adaptation of the Symbolist injunction quoted earlier. Motion understood from Mallarmé that bestowing too much direct attention on one's subject—in addition to "killing" it again in public—defuses the imagination of the reader. To keep the reader "guessing little by little," on the other hand, incites his imagination. So

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incited, the poet's words—if, of course, they are good enough to capture the reader's attention in the first place—take on a wonderful luminous quality. At least, this is what happens in Andrew Motion's poetry. It is a remarkable accomplishment.

If we persist in thinking Motion's shift to the narrative mode—with the concomitant refusal to speak in his own voice—to be merely a willful literary choice, "Skating," the prose memoir, will quickly disabuse us of this notion. Motion's recollection of being savagely beaten by schoolmates at prep school may not be enough to convince us of the eventual necessity of, as he says, "protect[ing] myself by rehearsing [my memories] as anecdotes." But his account of his mother's riding accident is. Thrown from a horse, she fell into a coma and died ten years later without ever regaining consciousness. Motion obviously felt that poetry could never do justice to this horrible incident. No doubt it dampened the desire to wax poetic over the beauties of nature. It probably also explains his obsession with violence—an obsession wherein the poet avoids, at all costs, any direct, unmediated account of violent incidents themselves. If Motion now and again pushes this anti-lyrical impulse a bit too far in *Dangerous Play,* it is for a good reason.

Motion has included in this volume the four-poem sequence entitled "Anniversaries," from *The Pleasure Steamers.* These poems, written on different anniversaries of his mother's fall, can easily be read as "secret narratives." But they have their lyric aspect as well—written in the poet's own voice. Ironically, they are among the most beautiful poems in the book. "The Third" is quoted here in full:

> Three years without sight,
> speech, gesture, only
> the shadows of clouds
> shifting across your face
>
> then blown a world away.
> What sleep was that, which
> light could never break?
> What spellbound country
>
> claimed you, forbidding you
> even to wake for a kiss?
> If it was death,
> whose hands were those
>
> warm in my own, and whose
> astonishing word was it
> that day when leaving
> your sunlit room I heard
>
> 'Stay; stay,' and watched
> your eyes flick open once,
> look, refuse to recognise
> my own, and turn away?

Speaking in his own voice and transforming unredeemable pain into a thing of beauty: these are the two cardinal sins of the aesthetic criteria governing the rest of *Dangerous Play.* Perhaps Motion has included "Anniversaries" to remind us of the price to be paid by adhering to these stern criteria. But even if there is a price, there is a gain as well. *Dangerous Play* is a splendid book.

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Letters

Early Hemingway

To the Editors:

I rarely if ever read Bruce Bawer, but my attention has been called to a reference he makes to me in his essay-review of Peter Griffin's *Along With Youth* ("Hemingway's Prelude to Paris," October, 1985). I have, he says, imprudently attempted to downplay the importance of war as a theme in Hemingway's work—imprudently because "war is clearly at the center of all but one of the novels."

Mr. Bawer has got me wrong. In an essay-review a few years ago of Hemingway's *Selected Letters,* I did not deny the obvious truth that war loomed large in Hemingway's literary imagination. And I did not focus, as Mr. Bawer implies, upon Hemingway's novels.

At the heart of my essay was a demonstration that numerous critics, from Edmund Wilson to Philip Young to Mark Schorer, have interpreted "Big Two-Hearted River" as a story about a war-traumatized young man, Nick Adams, who is struggling to choke off horrifying memories of the battlefield. The experience that has given Nick "a touch of panic," said Edmund Wilson, is "the wholesale slaughtering of human beings in which he has taken part." Yet the fact is that not a single reference to World War I appears in the story, and it is by no means clear, furthermore, that panic is the feeling that Nick is contending with. Hemingway's allusion to the "needs" Nick feels he has put behind him upon entering the woods also bears no discernible relation to war trauma, nor does Nick's manifest contentment with his "homelike" tent.

Nick's efforts to hold unnamed feelings at bay haunt the whole story and endow it with an extraordinary poetry. A beautifully successful piece of work, "Big Two-Hearted River" contains within itself all we need to know aesthetically. Edmund Wilson and company sought to improve it by reading into it things they knew—or thought they knew—about the author. Yet as I argued in my essay, the letters that Hemingway wrote during the war and afterward contain no evidence of war trauma. They do, however, reveal a raging obsession with his mother. If critics wish to read things into the story, why don't they think of her, rather than of the war?

Very briefly, I also touched on *The Sun Also Rises,* arguing that Hemingway had let Jake Barnes's war wound stand for a more subtle and complicated psychic disability which he was leery of dealing with directly. Nothing that I have subsequently learned about Hemingway leads me to wish to modify that statement.

While I'm about it, I might list some of the other errors in Bruce Bawer's essay.

1) It is untrue to say that T. S. Eliot and Hemingway had a "detached, hostile attitude toward women."

2) Hemingway was not the first American to be wounded on the Italian front.

3) Hemingway did not work for an advertising agency after his return from the war.

4) Hemingway did not model his "persona" after Mark Twain.

5) Hemingway committed suicide in July, 1961, not June.

6) Hemingway's wartime romance was with a

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nurse named Agnes von Kurowsky, not Agnes Kurowski.

7) The hero of *Across the River and into the Trees* is named Richard Cantwell, not Robert Cantwell, and his memories encompass two world wars, not one.

Much more disappointing, though, than Mr. Bawer's errors is the amount of time he spends skewering Peter Griffin's new book. *Along With Youth* is a pathetically inadequate accomplishment and doesn't merit anything more than a kiss-off. One could have wished that Mr. Bawer had himself written an essay about Hemingway's formative years in Oak Park, Kansas City, northern Italy and Chicago and their relation to his fiction.

Kenneth S. Lynn
Washington, D.C.

Bruce Bawer replies:

How flattering to discover that one belongs to that august pantheon of critics whom Kenneth S. Lynn makes a point of not reading! As it happens, I have read Mr. Lynn often—and have been, on various occasions, entertained, enlightened, and irritated by him.

First, let me respond to his list of "errors." Three of them are indeed errors. I inadvertently transformed June into July and Richard into Robert while typing the final version of my piece. *Mea culpa.* Agnes von Kurowsky became Agnes Kurowski as the result of a transcription error that took place when I dictated the last page or so of the piece over the telephone.

It was no error, however, to remark, as I did, that *Across the River and into the Trees* is "grounded" in its hero's memories of the First World War; Mr. Lynn seems to believe that to suggest as much is to deny that Cantwell also lived through World War Two. Regarding my reference to Hemingway's job in Chicago, the fact is that he did write advertising copy for a magazine called *The Co-Operative Commonwealth,* described by Charles Fenton as "a monthly house organ by which Harrison Parker, a Chicago advertising man, was publicizing his venture of the moment." I assumed that "advertising agency" was the briefest, truest way of describing the nature of Parker's business; apparently Mr. Lynn —who is writing a biography of Hemingway and thus, presumably, is immersed in these matters—disagrees. As for my description of Hemingway as the first American wounded on the Italian front in World War One, I am quite willing to believe that he was not; all I know of the matter, however, is that Hemingway's earliest celebrity derived from the widespread impression that he *was* the first American wounded on that front, and the attention he received on account of this distinction undoubtedly contributed to his transmogrification, by war's end, into the swaggering macho man of legend. (Incidentally, in a new biography of Hemingway—published in October—Jeffrey Meyers states that Hemingway was indeed the first American wounded on the Italian front.)

We come finally to Hemingway's and Eliot's attitudes toward women, and Hemingway's attitude toward Twain. For Mr. Lynn to place my opinions on these subjects on his list of "errors" is curious, for these are matters not of objective truth but of individual critical interpretation. For a supposedly responsible literary critic to make absolutely no distinction between questions of interpretation, on the one hand, and factual errors, on the other, is disturbing. All I can conclude is that Mr. Lynn's desire to counter my mild and respectful criticism of his Hemingway essay has outweighed a prudent regard for such elemental critical distinctions.

But then, Mr. Lynn has always been a literary man with a difference. At the beginning of this response I noted that he has, on occasion, irritated me; more often than not, what I have found irritating about him is that, intelligent as he is, he has an unfortunate tendency to allow his overweening affection for this ideology or that theory to color his readings of authors. When it comes to Hemingway, for instance, he is, as everybody knows, a full-fledged Freudian. Yet in his letter, oddly enough, he seems to be trying to downplay the breadth of his commitment to a Freudian view of Hemingway. He suggests that his Hemingway essay does not make a blanket assertion about Hemingway but aims merely to clear up a common misreading of a single short story. This is nonsense. Anyone who has read Mr. Lynn's essay knows that his purpose in it is much broader than his letter implies. What he seeks to do in that essay, quite plainly, is to give us a

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new Hemingway—a writer traumatized for life not by his experience in World War One, as was Cowley's Hemingway, but by his relationship with his mother. The essay's title, "Hemingway's Private War," which Mr. Lynn does not mention in his letter, reflects the breadth of this intention.

As Mr. Lynn indicates in his letter, the two texts with which he supports the argument of "Hemingway's Private War" are *The Sun Also Rises* and "Big Two-Hearted River." The former, of course, is a novel rich in post-World-War-One despair. To Mr. Lynn, however, Jake Barnes's war wound, which is at the book's imagistic center, is not a symbol of the war's devastation but a plot device whose aim is to account for Jake's sense of alienation. As Mr. Lynn puts it, "the author let a war wound stand for a more subtle and complicated disability which he was afraid to deal with directly." To Mr. Lynn, in other words, *The Sun Also Rises* is more than anything else a public footnote to Hemingway's private life, a collection of diagnostic clues to some mysterious emotional malady that Mr. Lynn attributes to Hemingway's Oedipal woes. This interpretation, it seems to me, is based less on a close reading of the novel (for even a cursory examination of *The Sun Also Rises,* with its obsessive references to war, would doom such an effort to failure) than on a tendentious analysis of the psychological conflicts reflected in Hemingway's personal correspondence.

Mr. Lynn's reading of "Big Two-Hearted River" works the same way. He argues that World War One, as a cause of Nick's ambiguous emotional disturbance, is nowhere in evidence in the story; but he neglects to remind us that this is the closing story of a book, *In Our Time,* in which over and over again the horror of World War One has been the theme of the interpolated vignettes. By the time one arrives at "Big Two-Hearted River," therefore, the war is set firmly in the back of one's mind, just as it is set in the back of Nick's—unmentioned explicitly, but definitely *there.* This is, of course, an instance of Hemingway's famous "iceberg theory," the idea of which is that the greater part of a story, like the greater part of an iceberg, should lie beneath the surface. Fond as Mr. Lynn is of using Hemingway's letters to support his interpretations of Hemingway's fiction, he nonetheless fails to mention, in "Hemingway's Private War," a letter Hemingway wrote to Charles Poore in 1953, in which Hemingway observed that "Big Two-Hearted River" "is a story about a boy who has come back from the war. The war is never mentioned though as far as I can remember. This may be one of the things that helps it." He says much the same thing in a letter to Cowley (August 25, 1948), and on page 76 of *A Moveable Feast*: "['Big Two-Hearted River'] was about coming back from the war but there was no mention of the war in it."

One last point. Mr. Lynn is right in describing Peter Griffin's book as "a pathetically inadequate accomplishment"; but I don't think he's right about my giving it too much attention. As the highly publicized first installment of a multiple-volume biography of the most celebrated serious American novelist of the twentieth century, *Along with Youth* threatens to be taken far more seriously, in various quarters, than it deserves to be. The purpose of my essay was, if at all possible, to help prevent that from happening.

The Cliburn contest

To the Editors:

One must not only agree with Samuel Lipman's article about the Van Cliburn contest ("What the Cliburn Contest Thinks of Pianists," September 1985) but express thanks that for the first time a journal which is not intended primarily for musicians uncovers the absurdities of what went on there. Everything he writes, as far as I am able to judge, is accurate and important, except for a few details, such as that Leon Fleisher *did* have a career between 1952 and 1965, and that the great solo music for piano certainly includes the works of Mozart and of Liszt. But there are a number of other points to be added, judging from what I heard on public radio and watched on public television.

It was a disgrace, for instance, to have comedian Steve Allen announce the events on the radio, for he was not in the least adequately prepared. The performance of Mr. Corigliano's piece elicited some comments from him that surely should have remained unspoken. Twice he translated Ravel's "Noctuelles" (night moths) as "Night Pieces."

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More important than the choice of an announcer was the choice of the jury for the contest. Is it proper—notwithstanding their individual merits—to invite a retired newspaper critic and a retired orchestra manager to be members of the jury? (The retired orchestra manager was in this case also a former conductor, which probably compensates for his being a music manager, but he was not asked to be a member of the jury as a musician.)

I agreed with Mr. Lipman's attack on the choice of pieces for the contestants, although the one redeeming factor was that each finalist had to perform a Mozart concerto. That the candidates had to play chamber music looks good on paper, but the way in which it was done served chamber music badly and failed to bring out the chamber music spirit in the contestants. By requiring a piano quintet with strings, a genre first employed by Schumann, the contest put the piano trios and piano quartets by the Viennese masters from Haydn to Schubert out of bounds. Moreover, as Mr. Lipman pointed out, rehearsal time was inadequate, so that—as far as I heard—metronomic playing replaced the give-and-take which gives chamber music performances their true character.

I hope therefore that Mr. Lipman will continue the good work and go even more deeply into the necessity for the reform of performance contests, or for their replacement by something better.

Konrad Wolff
New York City

To the Editors:

Samuel Lipman's challenging piece reviewing the television program on the Seventh Van Cliburn International Piano Competition deserves comment from one whose role in the proceedings he mentions, and who was one of those responsible for the Competition's organization.

To begin at the beginning: Mr. Lipman's title, "What the Cliburn Contest Thinks of Pianists," is misleading. He has deduced from the television program his own erroneous ideas of the purpose of the Van Cliburn Competition, which he sums up in the final two paragraphs of his piece.

I can assure Mr. Lipman that the organizers of this year's Competition did not see its "survival as an institution as the highest good." They had, on the contrary, foremost in their minds the need to find a first-prize winner "of musical authority and personal magnetism"—or rather, to find several winners with those qualities—and then to help to establish their careers.

Mr. Lipman quotes Stephen Potter's advice to failed tennis players: "If you can't volley, wear velvet socks." I have a question: why should not one be able to volley *and* wear velvet socks at the same time? Mr. Lipman sneers at publicity—which he equates metaphorically with velvet socks—("lavish but meretricious coverage"), and at hospitality ("the contestants' wary gratitude for all the kindnesses about to be heaped on them by their hosts"), as if the organizers of the Competition and those who took part were in some way demeaned by allowing the one and accepting the other. However regrettable, we live in an era when successful careers in the performing arts generally require not only talent but a certain amount of trumpeting too. As for the implied criticism of hosts who open their homes to competitors and provide them with all kinds of care and attention, its churlishness is lamentable.

Let me not be misinterpreted, however: I would be the first to complain if I felt that publicity, hospitality or any inessential activity were encroaching on the conduct of the Competition. I ought perhaps to remind Mr. Lipman that the schedule, which stretches more than two weeks, consists of the following: two preliminary rounds, during which each competitor plays music for solo piano; a semifinal round consisting of an hour-long solo recital and a performance of a piano quintet; and a final round, comprising performances of two concertos, the first by Mozart or Beethoven, the second of a work written since 1800. The solo repertory required, by the way, includes music by all the composers singled out by Mr. Lipman as "great." In other words, the Competition is designed to be a demanding test of competitors' musicianship, musical versatility and stamina, all of which qualities are necessary for a successful young concert pianist in today's overpopulated musical world.

The Competition is taken to task by Mr. Lipman for attempting to "emphasize the 'inter-

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national' character of everything" by describing two of the jurors as each representing two countries. "Neither," writes Mr. Lipman, "was in any real sense American." It happens that both Maestro Arpad Joo and Dr. Wolfgang Stresemann are American citizens, which would seem to be about as really American as you can get! By the rules of the Federation of International Music Competitions, of which the Van Cliburn Competition is an active member, the jury must consist of a majority of people from countries outside that in which the Competition is held. Mr. Lipman is of course right in his implication that the two jurors he mentions represent the cultural traditions of their native Hungary and Germany respectively. That is why they were chosen. They were introduced legitimately therefore as representatives of their countries of birth and adoption, not with any intention of aggrandizing the importance of the Competition.

To be further accurate, the first prize is described in the Van Cliburn Competition literature not simply as "in excess of $200,000," as Mr. Lipman writes; the official wording states that its "total value . . . is estimated to be in excess of $200,000." There is a difference: a large proportion of that money is earned by the gold medalist on the concert tours arranged for him (or her) by the Competition. I bring this up not to split hairs, but to explain one of the chief goals of the Competition, one that has escaped Mr. Lipman's apparently uninformed analysis. The greater number of the 70-odd members of the Federation of International Music Competitions do not have the resources, once the Competition event is over, to further the careers of their winners. The Van Cliburn Competition, in recent years at least, has assumed an active role in arranging engagements for its winners with symphony orchestras and presenters of recitals in North America and Europe, and for their administration. Whether the effort is worthwhile will of course not be evident until the winners reach artistic maturity, at a time some years beyond the Competition. I wait with optimism; Mr. Lipman, no doubt, with apprehension.

Mr. Lipman disliked the technique which Bill Fertik, the writer/director of the television program, used as a device to show complete movements on the screen—or considerable portions of them at least—without concentrating on one competitor to the exclusion of his (or her) colleagues. (How many performances can be fitted, after all, into a 90-minute program?) I admire and applaud Mr. Fertik's approach, but, unlike Mr. Lipman, I did detect "audible jumps" at the points where one competitor's performance cut to another. Also unlike Mr. Lipman, I was able to hear differences in the sonic quality of the different pianos, and in the touch of the competitors. There were also differences in tempo, which seem to have escaped Mr. Lipman's otherwise critical sensibilities.

It is appropriate to mention how the television program came into being, since Mr. Lipman devotes so much of his piece to it. Mobil Oil Corporation and Tandy Corporation/Radio Shack generously provided underwriting which made possible the most extensive radio and television coverage in the Van Cliburn Competition's history. Bill Fertik was chosen as writer/director of the television program, and although there was extensive discussion with the Competition organizers about its content, the concept and execution were primarily his. Except for the lack of identification of competitors and music performed—which has been remedied in a revised version to be distributed outside America, and, we hope, to be shown again over the PBS network—we applauded the final result wholeheartedly.

(Lest I seem to imply that Mr. Lipman is totally misguided, I must congratulate him on rating gold medalist José Feghali's performance of the first movement of the Haydn E flat Sonata as "the best piano playing on the program to this point.")

Mr. Lipman writes at length about the concerto performances. I'm sorry that he was not in Fort Worth—at least I assume from his piece that he was not—to enjoy the Mozart or Beethoven concerto which each finalist played in addition to the one from the "virtuoso stockpile." On the other hand, it might have reinforced his view that the "emphasis on concerto playing as the highest public criterion for winning contests" would speak even thicker "volumes concerning what contest managements feel their work is all about." As I read further and further into Mr. Lipman's piece I found myself wishing more

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and more strongly that he had picked up the telephone and asked Mr. Fertik about his conception of the television program, and myself what I believed the work of my colleagues and myself was all about.

Enough of details. What is ultimately distressing about Mr. Lipman's piece is the technique he uses: his criticism having been made, the reader is then assumed to have accepted Mr. Lipman's premises as factual, and his conclusions, as proclaimed in the final paragraphs without a twinge of doubt, as therefore proved. It is a shoddy technique. For my part, I would have enjoyed a dialogue with Mr. Lipman about the serious problems facing organizers of competitions, since he has obviously done some research and given the matter superficial thought at least. It is sad that his piece is so misleading.

Mr. Lipman has alas demonstrated that on this tennis court it is he who cannot volley; but I must compliment him on his glibness by admitting that the velvet of his socks is of the most extravagant and sumptuous quality imaginable.

Andrew Raeburn
Executive Director
Van Cliburn Foundation

Samuel Lipman replies:

Van Cliburn Foundation Executive Director Andrew Raeburn (who, by the way, will be leaving his position at the beginning of January, in the words of the Forth Worth *Star-Telegram,* "to form his own consulting company") has a curious idea of how a critic ought to offer judgment on what he sees before his eyes. For Mr. Raeburn, the role of a critic of a given television program is not to watch and respond to what is on the television screen, but rather to assume that defects will be corrected in the future, and that the producers' good intentions—at least to hear them tell it—should determine how the critic watches, what the critic hears, and what the critic writes.

Thus Mr. Raeburn, in reassuring us that the competition organizers were happy with the television program—was there ever any doubt?—writes:

> Except for the lack of identification of competitors and music performed—which has been remedied in a revised version to be distributed outside America, and, we hope, to be shown again over the PBS network—we applauded the final result wholeheartedly.

Great news for music lovers, who will not be told to what and to whom they are listening; equally great news for the contestants, who will now have a chance to profit in their careers from the reaction of the viewing audience. But the television program I—and the American viewers—saw did not have this necessary identification. I cited this in my article and I do so again, as evidence of the contest sponsors' and administrators' lack of concern with *musical* values.

I am pleased that Mr. Raeburn would have enjoyed a "dialogue" with me about what he thinks his work and that of his colleagues is all about; I can well understand that Mr. Raeburn found himself wishing that I had discussed Bill Fertik's "conception of the television program" with that gentleman. But, in my opinion, there is all too much music criticism being done these days with the assistance of just such private discussions and self-justifying interventions. The content of the Cliburn television program, I repeat, was just what it was on the screen, no more and no less. It certainly did *not* consist of either Mr. Raeburn's or Mr. Fertik's *a posteriori* justifications.

And so we are left with the questions which Mr. Raeburn does his best not to answer. Why did the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition present a television program to American music lovers which in the main did not identify either performers or repertory, which did not allow even one movement of a musical artwork to be played through by the pianist who began it, and which spent more time on such trivial contest formalities as the contestants' being welcomed at the airport, their drawing of lots for their performances, and the introduction of the judges to the audience than on the final-round performance of the winner? My article attempted an answer: the Cliburn contest cared more for itself than for its contestants and the music they played. In my opinion, Mr. Raeburn's defense suggests I was right.

I thank Konrad Wolff for his kind words. Mr. Wolff's agreement with the main thrust of my

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article is all the more welcome to me because he was a student of the great Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert pianist Artur Schnabel, and is the author of a fascinating book on that artist, *The Teaching of Artur Schnabel* (Praeger, 1972). Just to clear the record, I should add that I did not say that pianist Leon Fleisher did not have a career. I said that he did not have a great career. To deserve that appellation, a career must be long in duration and attract a large audience, or importantly influence musical life; the very talented Mr. Fleisher's career sadly did none of these.

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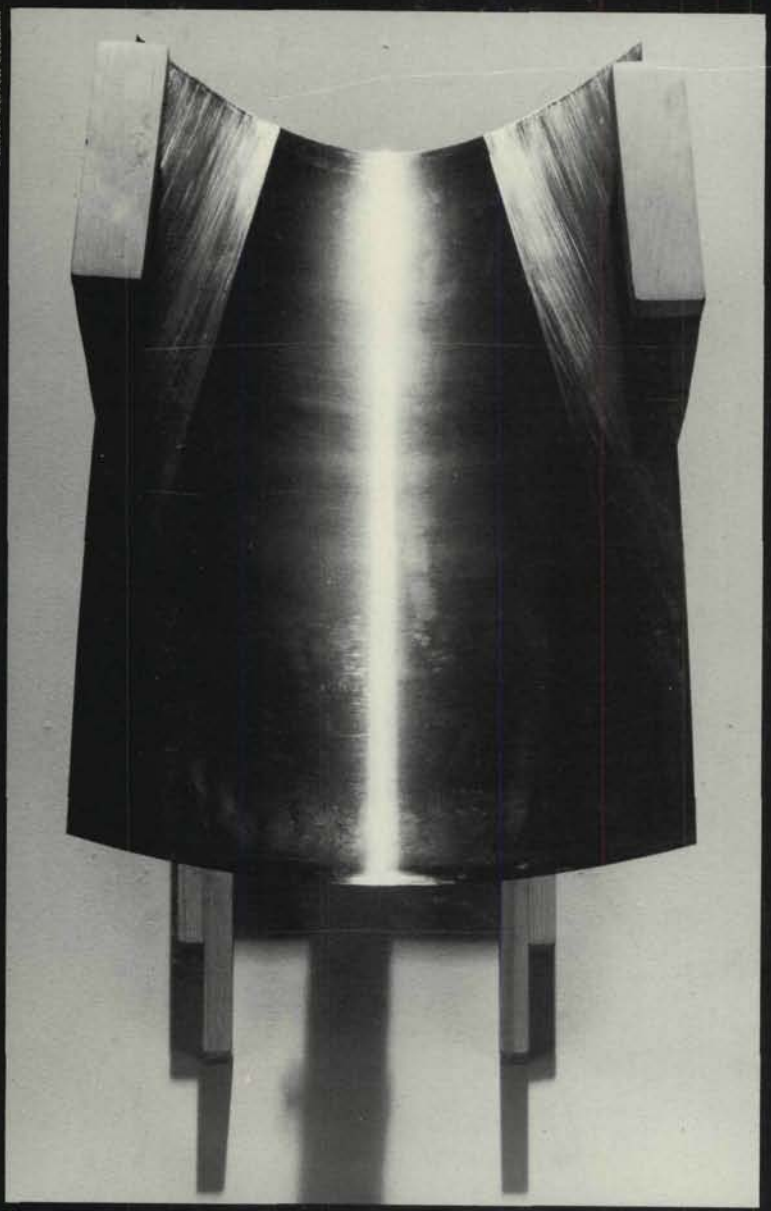

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